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The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

Louis P. Martini

A FAMILY WINERY AND THE CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY

With an Introduction by
Maynard A. Amerine

An Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser
in 1983 and 1984

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LOUIS P. MARTINI

Photograph courtesy of The Wine Institute

Red wine innovator Martini dies at 79

By TED APPEL
Staff Writer



Martini

Pioneering Napa Valley winemaker Louis P. Martini, the first American to bottle and sell unblended merlot — a varietal that three decades later is one of the most popular among

U.S. wine consumers — died Monday at his home in St. Helena only days after he was diagnosed with cancer. He was 79.

Though quiet and unassuming, Martini was an innovator who is considered to be a giant in the California wine industry by his peers. He took over the family-owned winery that bears his father's name and made the Louis M. Martini Winery synonymous with the top-quality California red wines of the 1950s and 1960s.

Martini was one of the first vintners to use stainless steel fermentation tanks, believing they would give him more control over the winemaking process. He was also one of the earliest winemakers to plant vineyards in the Carneros region of southern Napa and Sonoma counties, an appellation that is now recognized as one of the best places to grow chardonnay and pinot noir in California.

Among his other innovations, Martini pioneered mechanical harvesting of grapes on the North Coast, identified and propagated several grape clones still in use and began using varietal designations for his wines decades before it became the industry standard.

"He was a leader in our industry," fellow Napa Valley vintner Robert Mondavi said Monday. "He created a style of wine that is unique and very drinkable and very pleasant."

Martini was diagnosed with cancer just 12 days ago, a winery spokeswoman said. He died Monday morning at his home in St. Helena.

Fellow vintners lauded Martini as a visionary winemaker and a man from the old school, whose word was as good as a 100-page legal contract.

"I consider him one of the quiet leaders of the California industry's move into varietal wines," said Jess Jackson, owner of Kendall-Jackson Winery. "He was a true gentleman and a pioneer in the wine industry whose personal impact far exceeded that of his brand. He will be missed."

"Mr. Martini was an outstanding member of the wine industry," said Ernest Gallo, head of E. & J. Gallo Winery.

Born in Livermore, Martini grew up in Kingsburg, where his father had founded the L.M. Martini Grape Products Co. in 1922. The family moved to Napa Valley in 1933 just before the repeal of Prohibition, and his father renamed the company the Louis M. Martini Winery.

The younger Martini attended the San Rafael Military Academy and graduated in 1941 from UC Berkeley. He spent his senior year studying enology at UC Davis.

During World War II, Martini served in England as an ordnance officer with the 8th Army Air Force. When the war ended, Martini returned to the family winery as vice president and production manager.

He became winemaker in 1954, and was named president and general manager of the winery in 1968.

That year, Martini became the first American to bottle unblended merlot, a grape that had been used in blends to soften the edges of cabernet sauvignon and other red wines. Today, sales of merlot account for 10 percent of all table wine purchases in the United States.

"If we hadn't done it, somebody else would have," Martini said in a 1995 interview, displaying his characteristic modesty.

"He was so understated, really a humble man, despite being an icon," said John DeLuca, president of The Wine Institute.

Martini loved to get his hands dirty in the vineyards. He knew the vines and soils of his vineyards inch by inch, and he believed one

of his primary roles as a winemaker was to serve as a steward of the land.

"He spoke very lovingly of the stewardship of the land. His place on earth was to care for the land, and to leave it better than he found it. He certainly did that," DeLuca said.

Martini began to scale back his role at the winery in 1978, when he turned over winemaking duties to his son, Michael. In 1985 his daughter, Carolyn, took over as president and chief executive officer of the 175,000-case winery.

Martini contributed much of his time to the wine industry. He was an energetic member of the Wine Institute, serving as its chairman from 1977 to 1978 and attending lengthy subcommittee meetings as recently as a month ago. Martini was also a member and past president of the Napa Valley Vintners Association, running the group's first Napa Valley Wine Auction in 1981. He was a charter member of the American Society of Enology and Viticulture, and he served as the organization's president from 1956 to 1957.

Martini received numerous awards for his achievements.

Most recently, the state Senate Rules Committee approved a resolution this year commending Martini's selection as Winemaker of the Century by San Francisco Examiner wine writer Bob Thompson. In 1990, Martini was given the Wine Spectator Distinguished Service Award and the Society of Wine Educators' Lifetime Achievement Award. He received the American Wine Society Award of Merit in 1983; the American Society of Enology Merit Award in 1981 and the Wine Industry Technical Symposium's Leon D. Adams Achievement Award in 1980.

Martini is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; sister, Angiolina Martini of El Cerrito; sons, Michael Martini of St. Helena and Peter Martini of Seattle; daughters, Carolyn Martini of St. Helena and Patricia Martini of San Francisco; and four grandchildren.

Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Sept. 30 at the St. Helena Catholic Church, 1340 Taylor St. A celebration will be held immediately afterward at the winery.

Donations in Martini's memory may be made to the Louis P. Martini Endowment for Research, Department of Viticulture & Enology, University of California, Davis, CA 95616.

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PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstated as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator California Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed is made by a committee consisting of James D. Hart, director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; the chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute, who is elected annually; Ruth Teiser, series project director, and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator California Scholarship Foundation.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and wine making that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial wine making did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years (as yet treated analytically in few writings) will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of in many cases unique materials readily available for the purpose.

Three master indices for the entire series are being prepared, one of general subjects, one of wines, one of grapes by variety. These will be available to researchers at the conclusion of the series in the Regional Oral History Office and at the library of the Wine Institute.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the director of The Bancroft Library.

Ruth Teiser
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California
Winemen Oral History Series

10 September 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

Interviews Completed by 1984

Leon D. Adams *Revitalizing the California Wine Industry* 1974

Maynard A. Amerine *The University of California and the State's Wine Industry* 1971

Philo Biane *Wine Making in Southern California and Recollections of Fruit Industries, Inc.* 1972

Burke H. Critchfield, Carl F. Wente, and Andrew G. Frericks *The California Wine Industry During the Depression* 1972

William V. Cruess *A Half Century of Food and Wine Technology* 1967

Alfred Fromm *Marketing California Wine and Brandy* 1984

Maynard A. Joslyn *A Technologist Views the California Wine Industry* 1974

Horace O. Lanza and Harry Baccigaluppi *California Grape Products and Other Wine Enterprises* 1971

Louis M. Martini and Louis P. Martini *Winemakers of the Napa Valley* 1973

Louis P. Martini *A Family Winery and the California Wine Industry* 1984

Otto E. Meyer *California Premium Wines and Brandy* 1973

Harold P. Olmo *Plant Genetics and New Grape Varieties* 1976

Antonio Perelli-Minetti *A Life in Wine Making* 1975

Louis A. Petri *The Petri Family in the Wine Industry* 1971

Jefferson E. Peyser *The Law and the California Wine Industry* 1974

Lucius Powers *The Fresno Area and the California Wine Industry* 1974

Victor Repetto and Sydney J. Block *Perspectives on California Wines* 1976

Edmund A. Rossi *Italian Swiss Colony and the Wine Industry* 1971

A. Setrakian *A Leader of the San Joaquin Valley Grape Industry* 1977

André Tchelistcheff *Grapes, Wine, and Ecology* 1983

Brother Timothy *The Christian Brothers as Winemakers* 1974

Ernest A. Wente *Wine Making in the Livermore Valley* 1971

Albert J. Winkler *Viticultural Research at UC Davis (1921 - 1971)* 1973

INTRODUCTION

This represents the first second-generation oral biography in this series on outstanding men in the California wine industry. Louis P. did give an addendum to his father's oral biography in 1975. However, this interview constitutes his own story which includes family origins, his own family, school, the war years, and his career at the family winery in St. Helena.

Comparing his father's record with this one reveals some obvious differences between the two men. Louis P. admits to not wishing (or even attempting) to argue with his father, who, he notes, loved to argue. He also did not totally agree with his father's blending theories. Louis P. favors, and practices, more varietal identification in his wines and he is more tolerant, I suspect, of governmental regulations than his father was.

It also reveals some similarities. Both have striven for wines that are ready to drink when released, that go with foods, and that are sold at reasonable prices. Both recognized that aging modifies, mellows, and often improves the wine -- hence their Vintage Selection wines. Practices initiated by his father have been expanded and improved upon: from the Monte Rosso and Carneros vineyards to those at Healdsburg, Chiles Valley, and recently to Pope Valley and Lake County and from the simpler vineyard and winery practices of the 1930s and '40s to more modern ones.

There are charming and often revealing vignettes of William V. Cruess, Frank Schoonmaker, André Tchelistcheff, Louis Stralla, John Daniel, Jr., the Napa Vintners, the Napa Valley Technical Group, the American Society of Enologist the Wine Institute (which he favors for its state and national work), the Wine Advisory Board (whose passing he regrets), the Regional Water Quality Control Board, etc.

There are also perceptive notes on frost protection, irrigation, old and new varieties, mechanical harvesting, wine judgings (he's right on the mark here), varietal wines versus semi-generic wines, wine promotion, land use in the Napa Valley (it has, he notes, kept farmers on the land, but has not kept agricultural land prices down), etc.

Throughout, the winery has been, and is, a family-oriented business, and he likes this. His fundamental principles are worth pondering: Keep an even keel, maintain quality (hence the attention to vineyards, varieties, and practices which improve quality), produce dry wines which go with foods, and, ipso facto, stay in business and make a profit (though he doesn't tell this, it is obvious). And have a good and satisfying life. Well said.

Maynard A. Amerine

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Louis P. Martini is the second-generation head of a prominent Napa Valley winery and a man of influence in the California wine industry. This interview was taped in four sessions on December 27, 1983, and January 4, 11, and 17, 1984, in his pleasant and comfortable office at the Louis M. Martini winery at St. Helena. A quiet, rather retiring man, Mr. Martini gave his recollections and his views with spontaneity and candor. They reflect the characteristic that Dr. Amerine refers to in his introduction as keeping an even keel.

Little editing was required beyond moving some sections of the interview in the interest of chronological sequence. Mr. Martini made a few brief additions but no essential changes.

In the Regional Oral History Office interview with Louis M. Martini that was completed in 1973, the year before the senior Martini's death, Louis P. Martini gave a short interview to round out his father's account. It was not necessarily anticipated at that time that we would be able to continue the wine history series and add a full-scale interview with him. That it has been possible is to the distinct advantage of the historical record of the California wine industry in the twentieth century.

As a recognized leader in that industry, Louis P. Martini has been asked to speak to various professional and consumer groups, and he has at our request placed copies of a number of his talks, together with several technical papers, in The Bancroft Library. Mr. Martini also presented to the library a copy of the 96 - page illustrated book published by the Martini winery in 1983 to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary: THE LOUIS M. MARTINI WINERY, ST. HELENA, NAPA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1933 - 1983. It describes in some detail each of the vineyards and wines, and includes a short history of the winery and the three generations who have been principals in this family enterprise.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer-Editor

14 August 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

I FAMILY AND EARLY YEARS

[Interview 1: December 27, 1983]##

The Boragni Family

Teiser: I should begin by asking you when and where you were born?

Martini: Well, I was born on December 20, 1918, in Livermore, at my grandparents' home.

Teiser: What was your grandfather's name?

Martini: Peter Boragni. [spells it]

Teiser: He was a winemaker?

Martini: Well, yes and no. He was really a realtor in Livermore, but before the 1906 earthquake he had a liquor store in San Francisco,* and he bought the ranch with a little winery on it in Livermore partially for the purpose of providing wine for his liquor store, then continued to operate it after the 1906 earthquake just as a winery to make bulk wine out of his own grapes.

That, in fact, was how my father and mother met. My dad had a little winery in Pleasanton at the time and was also delivering wines in San Francisco to restaurants, along with his other customers, and he bought some bulk wines from my grandfather in Livermore. That's how he met the family, even though they came

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 113.

*The 1901 Crocker-Langley San Francisco Directory lists: "Boragni, Peter [,] wholesale and retail wines and liquors, 1840-1846 Union, r. 2800 Gough."

Martini: from about a mile and a half apart in Italy. They both were born in Italy and raised there up until I guess my mother was eighteen. He was thirteen when he came over, but they didn't meet until some time later.

Teiser: They had lived in the same area in Italy?

Martini: Yes. Their two towns are adjacent to each other. My father came from Pietra Ligure, and my mother came from Finale Ligure. The two towns are less than two miles apart.

Teiser: And your mother's first name was--

Martini: Assunta.

Teiser: Did you continue knowing your grandfather later?

Martini: Well, we used to spend a fair amount of our summers with him. I can remember when he still had wine in the winery. Now I don't really remember him actually making wine there. He grew a lot of crops. This was only a forty-acre piece of land, but it was really diversified. He had grapes, prunes, peaches, almonds, and hay on the property. And I remember him working with these other crops, but I really don't remember the winemaking.

Teiser: Where in the Livermore Valley was the property?

Martini: Are you familiar with Livermore?

Teiser: Somewhat.

Martini: Well, you know where L Street is? It's the main drag from the old highway into Livermore. It was the entrance to Livermore at one time from old Highway 80, before they built the freeway. And his property was right at the foot of L Street, and it is now between the old highway and Interstate 50 I guess it is; that's a freeway.

Teiser: No longer in agricultural use?

Martini: They sold it, oh gosh, twenty-five years or thirty years ago, and it hasn't been used for anything. It just grazes a few cows out there. All the buildings are gone from it, but the place is still there. It looks the same; there're even a few remaining fruit trees around the place, but the rest of it is generally used for

Martini: pasture now. That side of Livermore didn't develop like the other side where the atomic energy plant is. On the side that he was on, there's been very little housing developed.

Teiser: What kind of grapes did he have, do you know?

Martini: I really don't, but I suspect that a lot of it was Alicante [Bouschet] because he did quite a bit of grape shipping at the time.

The L.M. Martini Winery at Kingsburg, 1922-1940

Teiser: Was your first recollection of winemaking in Kingsburg, at the L.M. Martini Grape Products winery?

Martini: Yes. We moved there in I think 1922. My first recollection of it in Kingsburg, I suppose, was seeing grape trucks coming in, and just generally I had free run around the wineries as a kid; wherever I wanted to go, I just roamed around. My first actual work in the winery, I did some work right after Prohibition; I remember putting capsules on bottles and things like that during the summertime when I wasn't in school. But that's really the first I can remember doing anything around the winery itself.

Teiser: There was a considerable overlap between the Kingsburg winery and this winery at St. Helena, was there not?

Martini: Yes. This was built in '33, and we didn't move out of Kingsburg until '40.

Teiser: I believe I remember your father saying that he shuttled back and forth between these two, and also worked for [Joseph] Di Giorgio.

Martini: After he sold the Kingsburg plant, he started working for Di Giorgio.

This winery was built originally with the idea of producing bulk wines--dry wines--then shipping the wines to Kingsburg and bottling them there. He had not planned on doing any bottling operations or anything here; it was simply to be the dry wine plant for the Kingsburg operation. That was the reason that he originally built the plant.

Teiser: Then did he get too good an offer from Central California Wineries not to sell them the Kingsburg winery?

Martini: Well, partially that and partially it was that the sweet wine business was getting to be a bit of a rat race. And he asked the family whether they would rather live down there or come up here and have a smaller business and not get involved in the big-business rat race, and we all voted to do that. He had an offer to sell it, so he went ahead and sold it in 1940.

Teiser: I should think you would have chosen this pleasant place.

Martini: Yes. Well, I had no real interest in getting involved in running a big organization, and by that time I was a junior at Cal, so I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted and didn't want to do. I knew I didn't want to get mixed up in big business. So this looked a lot more appealing to me if I were to get into the business than the Kingsburg plant was, which was basically built for high-volume, low-profit type of an operation.

Teiser: Let me take you back a minute. There were, I think, a couple of years when you lived in San Francisco.

Martini: Well, I can't remember if it was a couple of years or one year or what it was, but we did live in San Francisco. We were down in what they call Butchertown.

Teiser: Where your father grew up?

Martini: That's right. I can't remember the street name now.

Teiser: Was this just between his jobs elsewhere?

Martini: Right, yes. Apparently, that was the family home. It had been the family home before, and it was also where he had built his little winery out behind the house when he first started bringing in some wines to deliver to restaurants. That was where he lived when he was working in San Francisco, when he and his father had the clamping business in the Bay. As far as I know it was the same place, and that wasn't sold until I guess after we moved to Kingsburg, although he worked around other places. He worked in Southern California and he worked at Lodi for a while. But I think he kept the house until he actually got settled in his own place in Kingsburg.

Teiser: Then the family moved there in about '22; you would have been four then.

Martini: Right.

Teiser: And you lived there until 1940, after this winery was built?

Martini: Yes. Oh yes.

Teiser: You must be one of the few people who grew up at a winery, living on the winery grounds, during Prohibition.

Martini: Yes, but I don't really remember that much about it.

Teiser: Let's see, Prohibition ended in '33, so you were--

Martini: I was fifteen.

Teiser: You were in school in Kingsburg?

Martini: Through grammar school I was in Kingsburg.

Teiser: Was Kingsburg so wine-oriented at that time that people did not notice that you had anything to do with wine or lived at a winery?

Martini: Well, they were used to having the winery there, but they weren't so wine-oriented. Kingsburg is a community with a very high percentage of Swedish people in it. I remember the town had a population at that time of about 1300 people, and it had thirteen Protestant churches in it, and not a single Catholic church. So for us to go to church, we and a couple of Italian families and a couple of Mexican families, we had to go to Selma, which is five miles away. And one of the strongest organizations in town was the WCTU [Woman's Christian Temperance Union], so we were not necessarily the most popular people in town at the time. So I kind of have the feeling of how minority races feel some times, because we definitely were a minority race in that area.

Teiser: As both Italians and winemakers?

Martini: And Catholics! [laughter]

Teiser: Did kids in school or anybody make fun of you?

Martini: I really don't recall that (I tend to forget unpleasant things), but then I was a very shy little kid and I didn't really mingle an awful lot. Now whether that was a reaction to they not mingling with me or vice versa, I'm not sure.

Teiser: Of course the winery had been built by Italian Swiss, so they had heard the word Italian.

Martini: Well, the winery had been owned by Italian Swiss Colony at one time, yes, but it wasn't necessarily built by Italians. [laughter] In fact, when my dad bought it, he bought it from F.Y. Foley. F.Y. Foley had originally I think bought it from Italian Swiss. My dad worked for him for a while, and then he went out of business when Prohibition came in.

Teiser: Was your home at Kingsburg a pleasant place?

Martini: Yes, it was pleasant enough. We were on the outskirts of town, but not so far that I couldn't walk to school. There were three elementary schools that were divided up, you know, from first to fourth grade I guess, and then fifth and sixth, and then seventh and eighth at another place, and they were at opposite ends of the town, and I walked to school at all places. So at most we were a mile from school, that's all.

It's a very clean town. Wide streets and very clean. It was a very nice town.

Teiser: The winery grounds themselves looked pleasant. There were a few trees, and the house must have been pleasant.

Martini: Yes, there were some trees on it, and we started out with somewhat of an old shack, but little by little my dad fixed it up and built it up, and when it ended up it was a very nice home.

The Brotherhood Winery

Teiser: The Brotherhood Winery was on the grounds, or adjacent?

Martini: Well, the Brotherhood Winery was simply a building that we put up and then leased to Brotherhood Corporation so that they could have a bonded winery in California, and we put some wine up for them, and it had their sign on it.

Teiser: I think it had a separate bond.

Martini: It had a separate bond, right, but it was on the same premises. It was our building; we just leased to them, yes. So when we sold wine to them, we could just move it over onto their premises actually.

Teiser: Did they crush there?

Martini: No, we did that. All they had was the storage building. In fact, I think they bought all their wine from us that went into that building anyway, and then from there it would be shipped back East to their eastern facility. Then they'd blend it back there. They did a lot of blending with New York State wines and this sort of thing. So I don't know what they did with it after they got it, but all the wines that went in there, as far as I know, we made; we just transferred over.

Teiser: The wines that your father made there were all sold in bulk, were they?

Martini: Yes, up until Prohibition was repealed of course. Then after Prohibition was repealed, we started bottling some wines under the Royale brand.

Teiser: And those were sweet wines?

Martini: Mostly sweet wines. There were a few drys--a claret and a burgundy I think, maybe sauterne--but most of them were sweet wines: muscatel, sherry, port. I don't know if we made white port or not, I can't remember now. Angelica. I don't know whether we made tokay or not either, I can't recall.

Teiser: Did you find all that interesting?

Martini: Yes, it was interesting. I mean I wasn't really that involved in the winery operation or the winemaking process or anything at that time. I was involved strictly in the mechanical work of putting capsules on bottles! [laughter] Pushing bottles around or wiping them or something like that! But I really didn't get involved in the winemaking.

Teiser: Did your father have any vineyards of his own?

Martini: There were about four or five acres at the winery, and then he had a twenty-acre parcel which had some grapes on it, about ten miles away, west of Selma, out in that area.

Teiser: Did you work in the vineyards?

Martini: No, not really; not as a kid I didn't. I did mostly chores around the winery rather than in the vineyards.

Teiser: So you weren't affected by the glamour of it all?

Martini: I could never see too much glamour in it! [laughter] I still don't see too much glamour in it!

Teiser: You have to come from outside the industry I guess to see it.

Martini: I guess, yes.

Wines for Religious Use

Teiser: I want to ask you about the rabbi and his wife who lived at Kingsburg.

Martini: Yes, well, we had a rabbi living on the premises, that is all that I can remember. Most of the other things that I know about him are the result of stories that my folks told later. He lived in a little house that was directly across the yard from us, and his purpose there was to oversee the production of the kosher wines that we were making at the time, the idea being that wines are supposed to be completely pure; they're not supposed to have anything added to them at all.

Teiser: No sulfur dioxide?

Martini: As far as I can recall, you're supposed to make kosher wines from grapes only, nothing else added to it. Of course in California you couldn't add water anyway, but back East and in other wineries in other places they could, and they could also add sugar back there. So things, like SO_2 , I don't think you could use either, although knowing what I know now about winemaking in hot countries, I think it would have been pretty difficult to make it without it.

Teiser: Perhaps somebody threw in a little?

Martini: I wouldn't be surprised. He couldn't be there twenty-four hours a day.

Teiser: The Catholic church was more lenient in this respect?

Martini: Well, the Catholic church had some regulations with regard to their altar wines, although we didn't do much for the Catholic church. In fact, I can't recall us doing anything unless there was something local; you know, just they bought some of the regular wines or something like that. They had a requirement, I think, of 18-percent-top alcohol, but they didn't require any supervision and they didn't require the degree of purity that the kosher wines required.

Teiser: Martini wines and grape products, then, went more into medicinal and remanufacturing purposes?

Martini: Well, actually our biggest part of our business at that time was not wines but grape concentrate, and then I suppose he also made some brandy because I know we had a still; he made some brandy for shipment into Canada, because you could make it but of course you couldn't sell it anywhere in this country. Then also we made some medicinal wines and some of these sacramental wines. But most of our business, I think, was grape concentrate.

Teiser: I said that I came across a leaflet from 1958 for your altar wine for the Episcopal church.

Martini: In 1958 we had a person working for us here, Bob Nicolson, who was a very strong Episcopalian, and he felt that there was a market for some wines, that they could be put up directly from the Episcopal church and distributed throughout the United States, through the various, well, I don't know whether they call them dioceses or what they call them, but anyway areas for the Episcopal church, under their label.

Well, we did sell some for a while, but it never really took off. Part of it was because of state regulations, part of it was the difficulty of getting it to remote places without excessive freight charges and so on for small quantities, because nobody ever took very much at one time. But if you added it all together, it could have amounted to a fair amount of wine if you could get it to them.

Teiser: Was there consideration given in 1940 to selling both the Kingsburg and the St. Helena winery?

Martini: We had never contemplated selling St. Helena; the purpose of selling the Kingsburg plant was to move to St. Helena.

Teiser: Silas Sinton was a partner in the Kingsburg company, L. M. Martini Grape Products?

Martini: Yes, Silas Sinton was a partner with my dad in the Kingsburg plant and in the inventory here; but the plant in St. Helena belonged strictly to my dad. He bought the land and built the plant. Then as he bought out Mr. Sinton--who wanted to get out of the wine business--he bought him out on a phase-out basis: the wine we sold belonged to the partnership, and the wine my dad made belonged to him personally.

Teiser: Yesterday afternoon I was reading over the Napa Valley Wine Library interviews with Napa Valley vintners, and I was struck by how many of them were frequently in and out of deals, as compared to this company, which seems to have been--

Martini: Well, I think that's true of any business. There are some people that like to get mixed up with a lot of other people in their business dealings, and there are some people that are independent as a hog on ice, you might say, and don't want to get mixed up with a lot of other people. We happen to be one of the latter ones. [laughter]

Louis M. Martini and the Prorate

Teiser: I believe your father had a brandy still at Kingsburg. Then he would have been part of the prorate, wouldn't he?

Martini: That's correct, yes, he was part of the prorate.

Teiser: Were you aware of that at the time?

Martini: I was aware that something was going on that he didn't like, but I wasn't really quite sure what it was.

Teiser: He didn't like it?

Martini: No, he didn't like that very much. He didn't like the government telling him what he should do with his product, no matter what the situation was. But I really didn't know what was going on. All I know about that really is what I've read in books since then.

Teiser: You would have been around though when the prorate brandy came out of storage.

Martini: Well, see we weren't involved in it then because we didn't have any. We had sold the brandy with the plant down there.

Teiser: And your rights to the prorate brandy, then.

Martini: Yes, we weren't involved in it at all at that time. In other words, when we moved up here we were out of the prorate; we didn't have anything to do with it any more.

The Move to St. Helena, 1940

Teiser: You continued actually keeping your home at Kingsburg until 1940, and your father went back and forth between the two wineries?

Martini: Right. Then we actually physically moved furniture, family, dogs, cats, everything up here in spring of 1940.

Teiser: And had your father built his home near by then?

Martini: No. There was a home here before that, on that same site where his home was that he rebuilt. But we moved into another little house that was down below at that time. (It's still there.) Then he started tearing down the old one that was there. He started tearing it down just at the start of the war, but couldn't rebuild because of the war. So after he got it torn down, the place just sat there for four years until he could get some building materials and start building, and he started building right after the war was over and finished it in '52 or '53, somewhere in there.

Teiser: Is it Mr. Anthony Scotto who bought it?

Martini: No, no. Mr. Jerry Komes. They're the people that now have Flora Springs winery. Scotto was going to buy it. He had an option on it to start with, but it never materialized, he never finished the transaction. Komes came along and bought it afterwards.

Teiser: So you continued growing up mainly at Kingsburg?

Martini: Yes, but by that time I wasn't spending much time at home. We used to spend weekends up here. Dad had fixed several rooms up in the old house. Of course I went to the San Rafael Military Academy for high school, and that wasn't very far away. When my folks were here, I'd come up here on weekends, and we spent a fair amount of

Martini: the summers here. I graduated from Cal in '41, and I was back here six months. Then I went in the service for four years, and I didn't get back home until '46 again, so I didn't really spend much time here other than intermittently.

Teiser: Your father bought this in '33, and he started building the winery immediately, didn't he?

Martini: Yes.

Teiser: Am I correct in remembering that he was interested first in buying the Krug property?

Martini: Yes, he looked at Krug's property, and he couldn't get together with whoever owned it then; [James K.] Moffitt, I think it was. And then he also looked at Greystone [Cellars], and there again they couldn't get together.

Teiser: How would you have liked to have been saddled with Greystone now? [laughing]

Martini: Well, I'm glad we didn't get it, frankly! It would be quite a process to renovate that with our family. Anyway, it wasn't really adaptable for what he wanted to do. He built this place to be adaptable for what he really wanted to do, and that was the reason he made it so that it would take large tanks, because he was thinking in terms of, you know, one red and one white wine out of the north coast for bottling down in Kingsburg; that's what his thoughts were at the time.

Teiser: Do you remember your first impressions of the winery as it was building?

Martini: I really don't. What I really remember is coming up here when we were looking for property, a year or two before we purchased it, and he used to park us--that is, my mother and sister and I--at the old St. Helena Hotel in town, and then he'd take off, and we didn't see him all day. I remember that very well because I remember wandering all around town on my own and looking the town over. But I was about twelve then, so I really wasn't that interested in the winery and its operation. I was looking around at the mountains more, places where I could ride horseback later on, more than I was at the vineyards or the wineries!

Teiser: When you came here in '41, after you had finished college, then that was maybe your first really analytical look at it?

Martini: Well, no, I spent some time in the summers up here during college.

Teiser: What did you do then?

Martini: Oh, worked in the bottling set-up here in the winery, or I remember I did a lot of hand-corking with the hand set-up, and he was building a stone wall that's up there at the home place, so I hauled a lot of rocks with dump trucks from what would now be the bottom of Conn Lake up here, out of Conn Valley, picking them up out of a creek and hauling them up there, and, you know, did just general things to keep busy around. One summer I spent cleaning out all the dead trees in the forest behind us, and things like that; things that a young fellow can do.

Teiser: Were you aware of any of the lab work that was going on?

Martini: We really didn't do very much. Yes, I did some of it, but not a lot. We had a chemist in Kingsburg, and most of the samples and everything were all shipped down to Kingsburg, and they were taken care of down there. We didn't do hardly any lab work up here at all at that point, that is, as long as we had Kingsburg. We didn't set the lab up actually until after we moved out of Kingsburg.

Teiser: Who was your chemist--or were there a number of them--in Kingsburg?

Martini: Well, there was a man named Vanderveen, who was kind of the chief chemist. Then we had--I'm trying to think of his name--a Japanese fellow, who had been a food tech graduate out of Berkeley about four years before I was there. Kiyoshi Nobusada was his name. N-o-b-u-s-a-d-a, I think. I think that's right. His first name was Kiyoshi, and everybody called him just Kay.

Teiser: Were you interested at all in his work?

Martini: Oh yes, when I was in Kingsburg I used to go up in the lab, and he'd give me a job of running alcohols or doing something relatively simple that was more or less routine work, and I would run those or run total acids or something like this.

But we didn't have a tremendous amount of lab work to do really. In those days we weren't doing that much bottling; we weren't as aware of shelf life and things of this nature as we are now--the wine was allowed to settle out naturally--so we didn't do a lot of the more sophisticated analyses at all.

Teiser: Did you keep a library of vintages to taste?

Martini: No. We really didn't start doing that until, oh, I kind of started doing that here, but I didn't really get started on it until the late fifties or so. My dad never kept any real library of vintages to taste either.

We have some wines in the library dating back to the forties, but they just happen to be around; there wasn't anybody trying to keep them for any special reason; they just were there. I salvaged all these sometime in the early fifties, when I decided that we ought to keep a little bit of track on them. For a long time they just sat around in cases off to one side, and finally in more recent years we built a wine library downstairs and we've got them all stacked away in bins now.

University of California, 1937-1941

Teiser: Let me go back to your schooling in San Rafael. Did you have any special interests in your high school years?

Martini: My main goals at San Rafael were to get grades to get into Cal! [laughing] I wanted to go to Cal. And at the time I wanted to major in chemistry because I thought that was the natural avenue for winemaking. When I got there, I found out that that really wasn't the way I wanted to go in the first place. I wanted something more practical than theoretical chemistry would have been, and that's why I switched over to food tech. The academy [at San Rafael] was pretty academic. It didn't have very many elective courses, other than the requirements for the university. In other words they were all solids; you couldn't stray very far afield.

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Teiser: In 1937 you entered Cal, then. Did you like it?

Martini: Yes, I liked it very much. To me, it was ideal because it was very impersonal. Nobody bothered me; everybody left you alone. You either made it or you didn't, and nobody seemed to care one way or the other! So I thought it was fine.

Teiser: You didn't go directly into food technology?

Martini: I started in the first year in the College of Chemistry. I didn't even realize that such a curriculum as food technology existed, frankly, when I went in. I just started with the idea of

Martini: going through chemistry. Then I started reading catalogs and whatnot and found out that food technology existed, and checked into it, and met Dr. [William V.] Cruess, and so on, and decided to switch over.

Teiser: Dr. Cruess was an enthusiastic teacher for a young man to meet, I should think.

Martini: Yes, he was. He was very enthusiastic about his field.

Teiser: You couldn't have taken enology or viticulture as a major, could you?

Martini: Well, that was given at Davis. But I wasn't really interested in that, you know, to take that as a single major, because I wasn't sure at the time whether I really wanted to come back to a winery. I wanted another outlet, and it looked to me like the enology-viticulture major was too narrow.

Teiser: Food technology would have taken you where?

Martini: Oh, you could have gone into lots of fields. The frozen food field was just getting started at that time. Canning. Olive products. Dried food products. All sorts of processed foods and vegetables. There were a lot of fields that you could move into with a food tech major.

Now, of course, the two are combined. They're both under food science, and so the requirements are pretty much the same for both, other than you take some enology courses instead of taking, I guess, fruit-drying courses or something. But at that time they were completely separate, even on different campuses.

Teiser: The food technology would have taken you into large companies though, wouldn't it?

Martini: Probably, yes.

Teiser: Were you thinking in those terms?

Martini: I wasn't thinking in terms of large companies or small companies; I was just thinking that I wanted to get through college and equip myself with something that I could earn a living at. And if it was to be in the winery, fine. If I didn't like the idea of going to a winery, I simply wanted another outlet.

Martini: I knew when I went to college that I would have to major in something related to math and science because I just can't think in terms of history and English and these sort of things. I knew that if I were going to try to major in something other than that, I'd probably flunk out, because I seldom worked in courses that I didn't like.

So regardless of what field it was in, whether I ended up in chemistry or biology or bacteriology or whatever, it had to be in one of those areas, and it looked to me like at the time that food technology was pretty good. In the first place, it would prepare me adequately for the winery if I chose to go into it. Also Dr. Cruess was placing everybody he was graduating at the time, and that wasn't true of all departments. He apparently had no trouble finding jobs for people if they graduated in food tech, in one food industry or another.

Teiser: Well, one of his many attributes was his ability to keep close to industry, wasn't it?

Martini: That's true. Yes, that's absolutely right. He kept very close to industry. He knew my dad and mother, and he had been down to Kingsburg, and he visited them. In fact, he'd even carried out some experiments there. As I recall, Dr. Cruess started a row of barrels of sherry under the film process at Kingsburg. I believe wines were made from different grapes at different alcohols, etcetera. I cannot recall what happened to the experiment.

At UC, when I finally went to see him, which was the end of my freshman year, he said, "Why didn't you come see me before you entered school here?" I said, "Well, I didn't want to bother anybody." He said, "I'd have got you started in the right place in the first place!" But all the courses that I had in the College of Chemistry would have been required for the other anyway, so I didn't lose out on that at all.

Professors' Influences

Teiser: Did Dr. Cruess kind of direct your thinking about your studies? Did he focus them?

Martini: Yes, he focused them. When we had individual projects he always focused me toward winemaking. [laughter] He always gave me the job that usually had something to do with winemaking. I know I took

Martini: a 199 course from him when I was a junior, and there again he put me on a project that had to do with winemaking, studying some Chalon yeast from France. Also, whenever we had projects in lab experiments and so on, he always saved the ones that had something to do with winemaking or grape processing. He gave me those to do.

So I did a little research work for Dr. Cruess on the Chalon yeast, but none of it was ever published. First of all, I never finished the project because I didn't have time at the end of the year.

Teiser: On what yeast?

Martini: Well, you know, the Chalon yeast are a film yeast that grow in the Jura district of France, and they form a kind of a slightly oxidized wine with a very peculiar flavor of that particular region.

So he had a gallon jug of this stuff, half full, with the film growing on it. He handed me this jug and he said, "Isolate and identify all the organisms in that film." And I got about twenty isolated, but I only got through identifying about seven of them before the term ended. Since I was carrying a full load of other courses anyway, I just didn't have that much time. I think that was the year I was carrying seventeen units, and mostly lab courses, so I really didn't have that much time. I shouldn't have undertaken it to begin with.

I got the food tech courses all in one year, plus I think two intersessions; I had to go to intersessions because they wouldn't fit otherwise, there were too many conflicts. I had to go to intersession to take some of the other courses that I had to take that would have interfered. They were part of the curriculum, but were not in food tech.

In the senior year I moved to Davis and took all of the enology and viticulture courses that they had to offer as electives at that time. I wanted to finish in four years; I didn't want to dilly-dally around for a fifth year.

At Davis, Maynard [A.] Amerine asked me if I wanted to take some 199 courses.

Teiser: What are 199 courses?

Martini: Well, that's undergraduate experimental work. I suppose that's still the designation. At that time 199 always meant undergraduate experimental work.

And he asked me if I wanted to take some, and after my experience with Dr. Cruess, I said, "No, but I'd be glad to work on some project if you want me to, but I don't need the credits, and I don't want to take it for credit because then I've got to complete something and write it up and so on and so forth, and if I don't feel like it, I don't want to have to do it. [laughter] But I will take on a project if I can complete it or do some work on it during the semester, fine."

So he gave me a project to work on--glycerol formation in wines--that had been started by somebody previously who hadn't completed it and had quite a bit more work to do on it. So I worked on that during my senior year as a special project, and that was published eventually.

Teiser: You with two collaborators, is that it?

Martini: Yes, [William] DeMattei and Amerine on that.*

Then after I got out--I was always interested in this film yeast for sherry--I had just got started on doing some experimental work up here at the winery when the war came along. I left, and four years later, when I came back, then I started all over again, and we did some work here at the winery on flor sherries.

Teiser: Let me take you back, then, to Cal, before you come up here again. Did you work closely with anyone but Cruess and Amerine?

Martini: No, not really. You mean the experimental work?

Teiser: Or in study? People who influenced you?

Martini: Well, for professors at Berkeley of course I had [George L.] Marsh and [Emil M.] Mrak and [Maynard A.] Joslyn and Cruess, those were the four main ones in food tech. And at Davis the two main ones were Amerine and [Albert J.] Winkler; those were the only two I can really remember up there.

*M.A. Amerine, L.P. Martini, and W. DeMattei, "Foaming Properties of Wines,"

Teiser: Well, you certainly studied with distinguished men.

Martini: Yes, I'd say they were.

Teiser: Did the others besides Cruess and Amerine have influence upon you in any way?

Martini: Well, I don't know. I suppose that when you work closely with some professors that an awful lot of their style of thinking and assessing things and evaluating them rubs off on you whether you really realize it or not.

I'll give you an example of that. Some years ago we noticed in our Napa vineyard some damage on the vines by 2-4-D. We had an experimental block at that time of one row each of maybe twenty different varieties, so when I noticed some damage on the other vineyards out in the field, I went to the experimental block and looked to see. Well, I noticed that some vines were badly injured; symptoms showed up pretty strong on some vines, some vines weakly, some vines not at all. So I just took a pad and a pencil, and I went through and I marked them according to four pluses for the badly injured, three pluses, two pluses, one plus, and so on. Then I threw that thing in the desk drawer and completely forgot about it.

About ten years later, I was sitting in here in the office and talking to Dr. Winkler, and he said he was about to come out with a paper on 2-4-D damage for grapevines, but he didn't quite have enough data on some varieties, and he was wondering whether I had ever noticed any damage or anything on different varieties. I said, "Gee, you know, that rings a bell. Somewhere I've got some notes." And I scrambled around through the desk, and finally I found this old pad, and I came out with these things and he looked at it and he said, "That's exactly what I want!" [laughter] So he incorporated it in the paper and it gave him more confidence in it. And it was also the same way he had them evaluated in his paper; he had given them four pluses, three pluses, two pluses, and one plus. So obviously I didn't dream that one up by myself. You know, somewhere in the background that must have stuck with me that that would be a logical way of assessing damage to a vineyard. So I suppose more of the things that you do are probably the result of contact with some of these professors than you realize at the time.

Teiser: Dr. Mrak, as I recall, was inclined to question?

Martini: Yes, to some extent. The one that was really inclined to question all the time I thought was Joslyn. I mean he was the ultimate as far as questioning. Even more so than Mrak was, I think. He was also very much more of a stickler for detail than Mrak was.

Teiser: Do you feel that he gave you an analytical sense that you might not have had?

Martini: Yes, I think both he and Amerine gave me--I would say that if I have any analytical sense at all that probably he and Amerine contributed the most to it, of trying to delve into something and really analyse it, more so than the others did.

Though Amerine used to impart a lot of information, Joslyn imparted a lot of information but so much of it went over my head. I'm not sure how much I actually retained! He had an almost photographic memory of things in books. You could never not read an article--let's say, read only the summary of an article--and then expect to answer his questions, because he knew the words in the article. When he asked the questions, he knew exactly what the answer was going to be, and if you tried to bluff your way through it he'd catch you every time; you could never get by with it with Joslyn. And it never bothered him to embarrass you in class if he did catch you at it. [laughter]

Teiser: Your contact with Winkler, then, came in your last year, and you took courses with him?

Martini: Yes. The viticulture courses were, as far as I can remember, all given by him; I don't remember anybody else giving them.

Teiser: Was that your first real study of viticulture?

Martini: Yes, that's right. Most of my studies before that had all been concerned with the enology side of it.

Teiser: Not plant science.

Martini: Well, I'd had some courses in plant physiology and things of this nature, but I'd never had any in viticulture.

Teiser: I gather that you were not as interested in the vineyard as the winery.

Martini: That's right, yes.

Teiser: Where did you start your work on clonal selection?

Martini: We started that in Napa County after the war.

Teiser: You didn't start it at Davis?

Martini: No, no. I didn't have anything to do with it at Davis. It all came about in chatting with [Harold P.] Olmo one time, and I mentioned that I thought that maybe we ought to take a closer look at a lot of these clones, and he said he'd been wanting to do that for a long time, and he in fact had already started the work before. But with his help, we went out and selected some various clones in mixed vineyards, and started propagating them in Napa. That's when we really started. And I would say that wasn't until after I was actually living in Napa County. I started living there in '47 and it wasn't until '48 or '49 that we started that work.

Teiser: You hadn't studied with Olmo at Davis?

Martini: No. In fact, I don't remember meeting him until after I came back from the service.

Teiser: He had written, I think, a rather influential paper on improvement within varieties.*

Martini: Yes.

Teiser: That's clonal selection, isn't it?

Martini: Yes, right.

And then we started working on Chardonnay, Riesling, and Pinot noir, those three varieties.

Teiser: I'll ask you more about that later.**

At Davis, everybody knew your father, I suppose.

Martini: Oh yes.

Teiser: So you must have been greeted as an old friend.

*"Improvement Within Grape Varieties," Grape Growers, December 1947.

**See pages 82-83.

Martini: Well, I didn't know any of them; I was just greeted like another student, I didn't notice anything special, other than Maynard [Amerine], who looked me up after I got into class and asked me if I wanted to do some special work or not. Other than that, I didn't notice any difference.

Teiser: I see, but he did that.

Martini: Well, he did that partially because of the background that I'd had from Berkeley and he had this work started which required quite a lot of analysis, and since I'd had that background at Berkeley he thought probably I'd be a good one to work on it.

Teiser: And you've remained friends since, haven't you?

Martini: Oh yes, we've been good friends ever since. In fact, that was one nice thing about both enology and food tech is that you remained good friends with all your professors, more so than certainly lots of other divisions in the university scene.

Teiser: I should ask also about your contemporaries. The people who were at Berkeley and Davis in your years, many of them have become prominent in the wine industry, have they not?

Martini: Yes. Especially at Berkeley. I can't recall too many of them that were at Davis in my class.

Teiser: Who were they?

Martini: Well, at Berkeley there was Charlie [Charles] Crawford, with Gallo. The late Ze'ev Halperin, who died a year and a half or two years ago; he was with Christian Brothers. And Myron Nightingale, just this year retired from Beringer's.

Teiser: He's retired?

Martini: Yes. He's kind of sticking around as a consultant, but he's retired.

And the other fellow in that same group that ended up in the wine industry was Aram Ohenasian. He was with Cella Vineyards in Fresno and then later with United Vintners.

Teiser: You still have reunions, don't you?

Martini: We've been getting together about once every two, three years, something like that, at one place or another. Of course the three of us that are still active in the industry are on several Wine Institute committees together, so we see each other fairly often.

Teiser: You graduated in '41 at Berkeley?

Martini: Yes, I graduated at Berkeley.

II CAREER AT THE LOUIS M. MARTINI WINERY, ST. HELENA

Working in the Winery, 1941

Teiser: You must have known that your father hoped that you would come into winemaking with him, I suppose.

Martini: Oh yes, I assumed he did. But that didn't make any difference to me; I figured that I was going to do what I wanted to do! I thought that I should probably come in, but if I was going to absolutely hate it once I got in it, I wasn't about to stay in it.

Teiser: So you came home--

Martini: And I went to work in the winery.

Teiser: What did you do?

Martini: Well, in those days I did a little bit of everything. The first thing I started doing was setting up a lab, in between doing whatever needed to be done out in the winery. I did kind of help my dad run the fermenting room that one year, 1941.

Teiser: Was that the first time you'd been through a harvest season?

Martini: Yes, because every other time during fermenting season I was always in school. I remember Cal used to start in August, so I was always at school when fermenting season came around. So other than just maybe coming up on a weekend or something, I never really got much chance to be in the fermenting room before. So that was my first real experience with a full season anyway.

Wine Characteristics and Winemaking Goals

Teiser: Had you been tasting earlier with your father?

Martini: Not too much. My first real exposure to tasting--analytical tasting, not just drinking wine at home--came first at Berkeley and then that year at Davis; more at Davis actually than at Berkeley, we did a lot more tasting up there. Of course they had some of the wine up there.

Teiser: Did you taste with Dr. Cruess?

Martini: Yes.

Teiser: Was he a good taster?

Martini: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think he was probably very good. But I wouldn't have known the difference then. [laughter]

Then, at Davis they were I thought much more analytical in their tasting and took more time with it and went through the statistical analysis and did all these sort of things that they did not do at Berkeley. But we tasted other things too. At Berkeley we had cuttings of canned fruit and all sorts of things like this that we tasted, and it was all very interesting.

Teiser: I suppose there's some carry-over?

Martini: Yes. Well, I think it's a parallel to tasting almost anything. I think if you can judge one food item, providing you have some idea of what the criteria are, you could almost judge any food item; providing you know what you're supposed to be looking for, and not something completely strange. But you can generally tell whether something is in good balance or isn't in good balance, whether something is too sweet or not sweet enough, or too coarse; there are so many things.

I remember one time my wife got the job of judging cakes down at the fair. She went through and judged and she had about fifteen cakes to judge, a job I would have loved! [laughter] But anyway, she brought a little piece of each cake home for me to taste, and she said, "I wanted to see how you would rate them." Well, it ended up we rated them the same way. Then when she asked me, "Why did you rate this one over that one?" I said, "Well, this is okay, but this has got a finer texture" or "it's got a better--"

Martini: And I don't know anything about cakes, other than I've eaten them all my life. So I think really if you have some idea of what you're looking for, if you can judge one item you can pretty well judge almost any other food item. It's because I think you're trained to take it apart and consider it component by component rather than just an overall taste.

Teiser: You have been drinking your father's wine since you were fairly young--I suppose you drank it at home with meals--

Martini: Oh, we drank wine and water. I think I drank very little straight wine until after I came back from the service. At home we always drank wine with water in it.

Teiser: Just plain water, not bottled water?

Martini: No, just plain water.

Teiser: Do you think that that established any criteria for the way you believe wine should taste though?

Martini: Oh, I think I'm definitely biased to our style of wine, yes. Now whether that's because we make it or that's because I've been drinking it all the time, I don't know, but yes, I think it would establish some criteria in your taste as to what you like for wine. I find that there're a lot of wines on the market that are declared very, very good, and technically I can't argue with it, they are very, very good, but I wouldn't buy them. I wouldn't enjoy drinking them.

Teiser: As a consumer, I think if you can find a winemaker who makes the kind of wine you like--

Martini: Yes, well, generally you'll find that different winemakers have certain styles, and they'll stick with it pretty close.

Teiser: Your taste in general agreed with your father's?

Martini: Yes, pretty much, pretty much. We had small differences. One of the differences that we had: He was more for getting a perfectly balanced and rounded wine that was good as a wine. It didn't concern him too much if the Cabernet tasted a lot like Cabernet or didn't taste a lot like Cabernet, or if the Zinfandel tasted like Zinfandel or didn't taste so much like Zinfandel. When I started taking over the winemaking, I got a little more concerned: I still wanted a nice, rounded wine, but I also wanted it to taste strongly

Martini: or as strongly as possible of a specific variety so it could be more easily distinguishable. But he was more for making a really good wine as such, a wine that has all of the ingredients in it that make it a well-rounded wine, and what it was labeled didn't concern him so much as whether it was really good or not. This was his general philosophy.

In other words, if he had to blend it to 50 percent to make it an exceptionally good wine and that blended out most of the varietal character, he would rather blend it to 50 percent, blend out most of the character, and make a very good wine out of it, a well-balanced wine, than to leave more character in and not have quite as perfect a balanced wine.

Teiser: I wonder if this relates: I remember that Frank Schoonmaker came here and saw that your father had varietal wines separated in storage. I guess he was going to blend into, maybe generic wines.

Martini: Well, yes, often that's true.

Teiser: And Schoonmaker suggested that he label them--

Martini: Separately, yes.

Teiser: By variety. Did that change his thinking at all, do you think, on this subject?

Martini: No, he believed in perfecting a wine by blending. Of primary importance was perfecting the wine, of secondary importance was the degree of varietal characteristic that that wine would carry.

I still want to perfect a wine if I can, but I do think that if you label a wine by a certain variety, it should have at least a very easily detectable characteristic of that variety. If you have to blend it so far that you don't detect a characteristic any more, then you should label it as something else, you know. Simply because it's made from Cabernet grapes does not automatically make it a Cabernet; it has to taste like Cabernet too.

Teiser: His way could take you into proprietary names, couldn't it?

Martini: Yes, yes.

Teiser: Did he consider it ever?

Martini: He did it once. He put out a wine that he called Monte Rosso for a while. It was generally a blend of three or four different varieties. We put out another one in the fiaschi when we used to be able to get the fiaschi that also was that label. But neither one of them sold very well, although the wines were good wines. They didn't catch on, so we dropped them eventually. But that was the idea, to put out a wine just called Monte Rosso and make a red out of grapes from that vineyard, but blend the different varieties so it doesn't have the distinction of just one variety.

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Teiser: A wine with a special name like that, you'd have to promote it pretty heavily in order to get a decent price for it, would you not?

Martini: That's true, yes. The real problem was we didn't have the promotion behind it, and it probably wouldn't have been worth the promotion that it would have taken to sell it.

Teiser: Now, with the higher varietal requirements, there are more restraints on labelling, are there not?

Martini: You have to have at least 75 percent of the named grape in the blend. Over the years we've kind of taken care of that by having the same grape grown in more than one area, and by doing that you accomplish almost the same thing as you do by blending different grape varieties, without really losing the characteristic of the variety, as far as trying to perfect a blend and balance it.

Teiser: You mean you grow, say, Zinfandel grapes that have one--

Martini: Oh, we grow Zinfandel grapes for instance on our Monte Rosso ranch in Sonoma; we have a grower right up the road here a ways and he grows some for us; and we grow them in Chiles Valley. And the final lot of Zinfandel that we put out is often a blend of those three vineyards. Cabernet we grow in even more places than that.

Teiser: How do those three, say, differ?

Martini: Well, their characteristics are generally different. If you were to take the wines separately, you could tell them apart very easily. For instance, the Sonoma Zinfandel is usually a heavier, robust, very strongly flavored wine, sometimes too strongly flavored. The Chiles Valley Zinfandel is much milder, generally good acidity, but much lighter tannin and much lighter body to it,

Martini: and not as alcoholic. And then the one over here is closer to the Sonoma one than it is to Chiles Valley, but it's still a little different character because it comes from this valley rather than on the mountainside. So they're a little bit different, and we just fool around with the three of them until we get the characteristic that we want in the Zinfandel. And we do that with most varieties now.

Teiser: Have you changed since this higher requirement?

Martini: Well, with one or two exceptions, our varieties have always been 75 percent to 85 percent of the total anyway, so the new requirement doesn't really affect us one way or another that much. And I think, frankly, there's been a lot of noise by wine writers about the new requirement, but for most wineries that make top-quality wines, I don't think it's going to have any effect on them at all because we're all using high percentages.

Teiser: It must be the present surplus of grapes that is bringing a lot of blends under special names onto the market now.

Martini: I'm sure they're trying every angle they can to get rid of some wines. You know, if it weren't for the surplus situation, you wouldn't have a lot of these white wines made out of red grapes either, but they're making them out of everything.

Teiser: Do you do any of that?

Martini: No. We haven't yet. We may for the first time this year. Mike [Michael Martini] made some Beaujolais nouveau, which I don't particularly like, whether it's ours or anybody else's, I just don't like young, raw wines. Some people raved about it, but I can't see it. I've tasted too many young wines in my life, I guess, so that I think wine needs some maturing. But the small amount we made seems to sell all right, so I suppose we'll do it again next year.

Teiser: What happens if you leave it around?

Martini: Well, it'll age into a regular wine, eventually. But it obviously hasn't got the same character. It just tastes like any other Gamay, though it won't have the same character that the nouveau has.

Teiser: So you went through the vintage season in '41 here.

Martini: Yes, I went through the vintage season; well, right up until Pearl Harbor.

Army Air Corps Service, 1941-1945

Martini: When Pearl Harbor came along, I scouted around and decided to enlist in one service or the other, and I ended up in the Air Force. It was called the Army Air Corps then. I was in armament. We maintained all of the armament equipment.

Teiser: Was your experience in those years--the four years that you were in the service--of value?

Martini: Well, I would say yes. In handling personnel it was very valuable. You had all sorts of men under you. By the time I got up into group headquarters, I had three officers and about 300 men that were working on armament of a group of airplanes, and that experience alone was very valuable. The experience of actually working on armament equipment doesn't do much good in the winery, other than it's mechanical. [laughing] I learned a lot about guns. But primarily it was the personnel thing. Of course, I'd had the four years of military school before, so the military part of it I had already had. In fact, the discipline was far tougher at the military school than it ever was in the Army Air Corps. [laughter] But I would say in handling personnel and just generally maturing and, you know, giving you an opportunity to do something on your own and gain confidence, that sort of thing was undoubtedly helpful afterwards.

Teiser: At the largest, how many people do you have involved in this winery? I mean in the whole operation.

Martini: In the whole operation, probably at the very peak of harvest season, when all vineyards are picking, a hundred at the most. And the vineyards pretty well take care of themselves. We have a foreman on each ranch and they're very good and they handle our men, so we don't really directly from here have much to do with the individual people on the ranches.

Teiser: When you came out in '45 was your term of duty over?

Martini: Well, at the end of the war they started discharging people that wanted out, according to the number of points you had accumulated--and that depended upon a lot of things during the service--and when my turn came, I had a choice. I could have stayed in if I'd wanted to. And I would have thought about it had I not had the winery to come back to, because I didn't mind it. Just before I got out, I'd made major, and the pay was pretty good and I couldn't complain about the life or anything; I didn't mind the military part at all.

Return to the Winery

Martini: But I thought I really ought to come back to the winery and give it a crack and see how it would work out. So I just mustered out into the reserves, that's all, and stayed in the reserves. I still am in the reserves.

Teiser: If you'd got back here and decided you really didn't like it, could you have gone back into the military?

Martini: Probably. I was called back for Korea, back to active duty. But whether it was a stroke of luck or not, at the time I had a-- Well, I've had a bum back actually all my life, but I never told the army about it when I first went in. But this time I really didn't want to go back because things were going too good here. So I told them about it this time and gave them a history of it and so on. Then they said unless I waived my back so that they wouldn't end up being responsible for it, they wouldn't let me back in. So I said, well, I didn't really think I wanted to waive my back. [laughter] So they said, "Well, then we'll have to put you in the retired reserves." And I said, "That's fine with me."

I figured there wasn't any point in remaining in the active reserves if every time we get involved in a skirmish someplace you get called back to active duty, and if you're running a plant you just can't take off for two years here and two years there. It's one thing going for two weeks someplace; it's something else going for a year or two years. So I figured, "Well, I better get out of this active reserves business." And they didn't need me anyway. They had officers running out of their ears in that place that they didn't know what to do with, so I figured there was no point in going back. I wouldn't mind having gone back if we were in an all-out war and I really felt we were needed, but I didn't feel we were needed at all.

Teiser: So you stayed here.

Martini: So I figured I might as well stick with the winery.

Teiser: Did your experience in '41 give you a better idea of what you would find when you returned here, then?

Martini: I never thought about it that way, but probably yes, it gave me a little better idea. My main concern about coming back wasn't so much whether I liked the work or not, it was whether I and my dad

Martini: could get along, quite frankly. And I think that's a concern anybody that gets into a family organization should have. You know, I think that's very important. If we could find a way that we could both work in the same place and get along, why, it was fine. I didn't mind the work; I thought the winery work was okay, as far as I was concerned.

The format that we found by which we could work together was that I kind of adopted the attitude that this was his winery; he was the general, I was part of the staff. I made my recommendation--if he accepted it, fine; if he didn't accept it, it was really his money, he had earned it, and if he wanted to waste it doing that, we'd go ahead and do it. I couldn't see any other way it would work.

And I found out after a while that that worked pretty well, because if I really made recommendations--whether it was to buy equipment or whether it was to make a blend or whatever it was--that was diametrically opposed to what he wanted to do, he generally didn't do anything. Sometimes he would come around to my way of thinking later on, and sometimes he wouldn't. But in any event it stopped the action right there; he didn't do anything for a while. At least he didn't just go jumping ahead and doing it in spite of what I said. So I found out that that was the most effective way to do it.

And I wouldn't argue with him. Of course he didn't like that; he used to like to argue. But I just wouldn't argue with him. I would say, "Well, this is what I recommend we do," and I'd tell him why, and then I'd leave, and let him think about it! [laughter]

Teiser: That's infuriating.

Martini: I know. [laughter] Then, if he wanted to do it the other way, that's up to him. Then he'd say, "Well, I want to do it this way." I'd say, "Okay, it's your money. It's going to cost more this way." Or, "It's going to take longer," or something. "But it's your money, you go ahead and do it the way you want."

That way it worked out all right; we got by. And I found out, as years went on, he'd take more and more recommendations, or he'd just let me go ahead and do something without bothering to get his okay. And I also found out that in a lot of things it really didn't matter; if he wanted to do something a certain way, you know,

Martini: let him do it. Even though I wouldn't have done it that way, it didn't make any difference to me which way it was done, just so the final results ended up the same. But that way we managed to hit a formula that worked.

Martini Sherries##

[Interview 2: January 4, 1984]

Teiser: Your father said that when he left Kingsburg he brought his sherry, or some of his sherry here.

Martini: We brought some of the sweet wines up here, yes. That's right. He had set aside both cream and dry sherries that he brought up here, and part of that is the start of our current solera system that we are still using, actually.

Teiser: And since you yourself had been interested in sherry, why, that worked out well?

Martini: Yes, I was interested in it at that time, and we've always had a continued interest in sherry production, even though the public hasn't had a very great interest in sherry purchasing.

Teiser: It goes in and out of fashion, doesn't it?

Martini: Apparently. I'd like to see it go back in now for a change; it's been out for quite a while.

Teiser: I have read that your father bought the Rennie Winery for his sherry house.

Martini: That must have been on the ranch, near his home. It used to be the Rennie Winery; it wasn't a winery any more. All it was was four walls and a roof, and we just used that to store sherry in because we were working with some flor yeast and we didn't want to contaminate the winery down here, so we used that up there to store the sherry. It's the winery now that has been sold to the Komeses and converted over to Flora Springs; it's now known as Flora Springs Wine Company.

Teiser: And where do you keep your sherry now?

Martini: Well, now we keep it here, but we have better bottling techniques and so on, so we're not as fearful of the film yeast now as we were then.

Teiser: It never occurred to me you could get film yeast from sherry into other wines.

Martini: Well, it could give you some trouble, but if you use good bottling techniques and good cellar practices it really shouldn't.

Teiser: But you still make a flor sherry?

Martini: We still make a sherry, but we make it more by blending. The last twenty years or so, we've been buying young our sherry material that has been already subject to the flor process, and then aging it and blending it ourselves, and introducing it into our solera.

Teiser: Who makes flor sherry now?

Martini: We've been getting it from Sierra Wine Company in Tulare.

Teiser: They're not using the submerged process?

Martini: Yes, they're using the submerged process.

Teiser: Which is not the conventional process.

Martini: That's right.

Teiser: Is it just as good?

Martini: Well, it doesn't work out, I don't think, quite as well as the Spanish are able to get by the conventional system, but it works out better than we're able to get by the conventional system. The conventional system had too many headaches in with it; too much chance for spoilage and too many other problems connected with it.

Teiser: Was that just because of exposure to oxygen or the air?

Martini: Yes, primarily. You could get other organisms that would come in and set up housekeeping, you could get excessive oxidation. Sometimes you got beautiful film growth and no flavor at all, and you can't figure out why. So the submerged-culture process doesn't get quite the same results, but lends itself better to our type of operation.

Teiser: Is anyone trying to make flor sherry at present?

Martini: I don't think so, any more. Almaden may still have some. I don't know whether they still have some or not, but they'd be about the only ones I know of.

Teiser: You have continued making both dry and sweet sherries?

Martini: Yes. But very small quantities.

Teiser: Maybe it'll be back in popularity.

Martini: Well, I hope so. As a matter of fact we've got enough sherry on hand right now that if we didn't buy another drop for ten years, at the current rate of sales we'd have enough to last us for ten years.

Teiser: Your solera goes back to Kingsburg, then?

Martini: Oh yes, yes.

Teiser: So it's how many years old?

Martini: Well, the sweet one was actually started in '47; that was started here. The dry one was started in '36, I think, in Kingsburg, and then brought up here.

Teiser: I don't suppose anyone else has that old a one.

Martini: Well, the dilution factor between then and now is considerable. [laughter] There may be a few molecules left of the old stuff in it.

Vineyard Acquisitions

Teiser: Your father had bought the Monte Rosso vineyard in Sonoma County in the 1930s?

Martini: In '42, I think it was, he bought what was known as the Stanly Ranch in Napa County, on Stanly Lane in the Carneros district. It is our La Loma vineyard.

Martini: Then in the late fifties and early sixties we decided to expand the vineyards. Up till then we had the two vineyards, and a little bit of home vineyard here at the winery. Then in the late fifties we decided we needed more grape land, and we started looking around. In 1962 we picked the Healdsburg ranch, Los Vinedos del Rio, in northern Sonoma County on the Russian River.

It was also at that time that we decided there wasn't any point in the winery owning it because it would just add to the estate of my folks, which was already big enough, so we formed another corporation in which my wife and I were the principal stockholders; we formed Edge Hill Farms at that time. I think Edge Hill Farms was formed in 1962, and actually for the purpose of buying the Healdsburg ranch; that's the one that we got first.

And then we weren't really in the market for any more land, but this one down in Las Amigas in the Carneros came up for sale, and the real estate agent came around and asked us if we were interested, and we said, "No, we've just bought 200 acres, and we really don't want any more right now." And he said, "Well, make an offer on it." We knew BV [Beaulieu Vineyards] already had bought the place next door. We knew what they had paid for it, so we made an offer of about half that much, figuring we'd never get it, and the son of a gun comes back in three days and says, "All right, you've got it." [laughing] So we ended up with it. At that time, 1962, it was a sixty-acre parcel. Since then we've added eighty acres to it, so now it's a 140-acre ranch. But we really didn't want it, because we really felt that we had more than we could chew already without adding something else.

Then also, just a little bit later, in 1964, Glen Oak ranch in Chiles Valley [Napa County] became available. I saw that quite by accident. The realtor, who is a friend of ours up here in St. Helena, asked me to go out and take a look at it and see what I thought of it as vineyard land. So I went out and took a look at it and decided that it looked very good as vineyard land. I asked him what he wanted for it, and the price seemed reasonable, so we bought that one. So we really got more than we wanted in land at the time, and we couldn't possibly get it all planted.

Teiser: But you must be glad now.

Martini: Yes, now I'm glad we have it, sure. That's right. But at that time we were not only wondering how we were going to get it all planted, but how we were going to get it all paid for. [laughing] But it worked out all right.*

*For discussion of the more recently purchased Lake County ranch, see pages 70-72.

Teiser: Having bought land at pre-inflated prices must make it easier for you to hold down your product prices.

Martini: Well, it helps to keep prices of wines down all right. It certainly does.

Teiser: It's curious because I suppose it makes some people think that since your wines are prices lower than others of what many consider similar quality, they're not really as good.

Martini: Yes, well, I've gotten that argument a lot from people, even from store owners that say, "Well, why don't you price them up higher?" and so on. And certainly from a lot of other winery people. But my feeling has always been, "We don't need to do that. Why charge the consumer more than he should be paying for it?" We'd just turn around and give it to the government later anyway!

Wines of the 1940s

Teiser: I think your father in his interview told about Frank Schoonmaker coming in 1940 and looking at his wines and suggesting varietal labels, as we mentioned. Did Schoonmaker then play a part in your marketing from then on?

Martini: Yes. Schoonmaker had a marketing company back there, and he was actually our first distributor that sold our wines back east.

While Schoonmaker was a great wine man, he apparently was not a great businessman, and his marketing company wasn't doing all that well. Then he went off to the war; during the war he was in OSS [Office of Strategic Services] overseas. It was during that time then that the company kind of flubbed around, and "21" Brands moved in and bought out the company and the wines that they were distributing.

Teiser: Bought out the Schoonmaker company?

Martini: Right, correct.*

Teiser: Did he himself have an effect upon your wines, your merchandising, your policies?

*See also page 78.

Martini: It's hard to say. I don't know really. When he was active in the industry at that time, I wasn't around; I was either in college or in the service, but mostly in the service, and I really don't know if he had any effect. I think he might have in some respect in putting out varietal wines, and he might also have in talking my dad into going national with the wines, even though we didn't have a lot at the time, because he was going to distribute them back east. Other than that, I don't think he had an awful lot of effect on it.

Teiser: The Martini wines became so quickly respected, prestigious.

Martini: Well, first of all I think my dad made good, sound wines; they were clean wines. They may not always have been the greatest varietal characteristics, but they were always clean wines, and people didn't know varietal characteristics anyhow in those days. But there was an awful lot of unclean wines on the market, and by contrast I think they looked pretty good.

The other thing was that we got helped tremendously by the war, because all the European wines were knocked out, and so we got a start and a foothold in a lot of markets simply because there were no other wines available.

Teiser: The other wines of prestige, I guess, were Beaulieu--

Martini: Inglenook, Wente. Krug was just getting started; during the war I don't think they were much of a factor. In fact they weren't a factor at all because I don't think they started the Krug label until after that, after the war.

Teiser: Beringer had a small part of it, I suppose.

Martini: Beringer, yes, they were in it. Of course Almaden. Paul Masson. Christian Brothers were in there; although they were nearly all sweet wines then, they made very little dry wine.

Teiser: Not all of those were of the same quality that you and Beaulieu--

Martini: Yes, but as far as the consumer is concerned I think they were. You know, in the east they were all in together, more or less. Among the people that knew wines, I think probably Beaulieu and us and Wente and some of these were at one level above it.

Teiser: Yes. The others of course went up and down a bit too.

Martini: Yes, that's true. Well, depending upon how fast their volume grew; what the quality of their wines was at the time depended a lot upon that.

Teiser: Those that you mentioned were wineries that had continuity too. I mean you and Beaulieu and Inglenook had continuity at that time.

Martini: Well, that's right. Italian Swiss and some of these others were sold to distillers and then bought back and changed all over the place. So this isn't anything new, all these partnerships and changes within the industry now; it's always happened.

Napa Valley Wine Men of the 1940s

Teiser: When you came back, then, in 1945, those established wineries were going well. Did you know Mr. [Georges] de Latour?

Martini: I knew him, but very scantily, not well, because he really wasn't that involved in the activities of the industry up here.

Teiser: You knew André Tchelistcheff?

Martini: Oh yes, I knew André.

Teiser: What was he like at that time?

Martini: Oh, just as dynamic as now, only with a little more energy. [laughing] It seems hard to imagine, but he had. He was a very dynamic fellow.

Teiser: Did he bring to this valley something it didn't have before?

Martini: Yes, I think the one thing he brought to this valley was some scientific thinking that there hadn't been too much of before. Everybody had kind of been making wine by the seat of their pants until André arrived, and a few others that had had some training in enology before they got here. But he was primarily the mover for it.

Like he was the one that moved the rest of us to start a Napa Valley Wine Technical Group. He had an independent laboratory uptown, and he was doing some experimental work, and some of us that didn't have the time to run analysis--like after the harvest, where you've got lots of them to run all at once--we'd send the analysis up there for him to run, things of that nature.

Martini: I would say that he was responsible more than any other one person for getting the winemakers in the valley into thinking in experimental terms and in scientific terms, simply by our conversations and get-togethers in this Wine Technical Group when it first started.

Teiser: Well, that tied in with your own inclination too, didn't it?

Martini: Yes, I had the inclination, but I didn't have the gumption that André had in getting out and organizing things. [laughter]

Teiser: John Daniel, Jr., was active, wasn't he, when you came back?

Martini: Yes. I knew him very well because I worked with him a lot.

Teiser: Can you speak a little of him? We missed interviewing him.

Martini: Well, he was an outstanding individual. Now he wasn't a scientifically-oriented person from a production point of view, but he was very businesslike and he was a great moderator of things and also a good mover, and he was a good, hard worker for the industry. I worked with him a lot in the Napa Valley Vintners as well as the Wine Institute, and he was very active in these outside industry activities.

Teiser: Clearly, he was important.

Martini: I think his importance in the industry was that he added stability to it, in the sense that if the industry started off on a tangent, he was always the one to try and make some sense out of it.

Teiser: For instance.

Martini: Oh, I can't really think of specific things. But I can recall him at Wine Institute meetings where somebody would start getting brainstorms and so on, and he would always moderate and say, "Well, let's think about it a little more, let's not rush into it, let's not do this." He himself was a kind of stabilizing influence because he was a bit of a fence-sitter. He wasn't radical one way or the other on any of these issues that used to come up. And he also was very good--

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Teiser: You were speaking of John Daniel, and you said he was also very good at public relations work.

Martini: Yes, he was very good at public relations work. He was very smooth, very articulate, he could say what he needed to say in the minimum number of words. And he was generally I think very well liked by the other members of the industry and very well respected.

Teiser: Did he uphold quality standards?

Martini: Oh, very much so, yes. He not only upheld quality standards, he improved them I think. He definitely set the standards I think in the valley for lots of wines, lots of varietal wines that were made.

Teiser: By example?

Martini: By example, yes.

Teiser: What was he like personally? I met him only once.

Martini: Very pleasant and very soft-spoken, never seemed to get excited, had a real good sense of humor, kind of a dry one but a good one. He was a very nice person. He was a real loss to the valley when he died.* I think he contributed a lot to the industry, both in the valley and to the whole California industry as well.

Teiser: What's happened to his library?

Martini: I think Betty [his wife] sold it. Not long after his death I think she sold it, but I don't know who bought it.

Teiser: It must have been one of the great libraries of its kind.

Martini: Apparently it was, yes.

Teiser: There were a lot of people who were well known here; I think of names like Louis Stralla, who was a local man.

Martini: Well, Stralla was I think a fairly important individual in the valley. He not only served as mayor and so on--I'm sure this is all documented elsewhere--but he was a mover; he got things going. He never really was a quality wine man; he was interested really in making bucks, and he made no beans about it. It didn't make .

*John Daniel, Jr. died July 13, 1970, aged 63.

Martini: any difference to him whether he made them selling lees or selling first-class wines or anything else. He was primarily interested in making money. But he was a very shrewd businessman and a very shrewd operator.*

Teiser: Did he add to the economic stability of this area?

Martini: Oh, I really couldn't say with regard to that; I don't know. He had so many transactions going at the time--land, and interest up in the Russian River, and he had Stag's Leap for a while--he had so many things going that I really don't have any idea of what his overall effect was in the valley.

Teiser: What about the others? The Mondavis came into the picture in the early forties, about when you first came here.

Martini: Well, Bob [Robert Mondavi] must have been here, I guess, in about 1940 or '41. He was here then. They had the Sunny St. Helena Winery. The first time I met Bob, I recall, was after I graduated from college and was back here at the winery, and he had been here for a year or two before that.

Teiser: He was too young to be an influence upon the industry then, I suppose.

Martini: Well, he became one pretty quickly because, you know, he's pretty dynamic. I really didn't get to know him very well until after I got back from the service and had spent some time with the vintners and so on, and then got to know him better then.

The Napa Valley Technical Group

Teiser: Who were the others in the Napa Valley Technical Group that you spoke of?

Martini: That we first started with?

Teiser: Yes.

*Louis E. Stralla died in 1942.

Martini: The ones I can think of were André and Pete [Peter] Mondavi. Of course that didn't start until '47, the technical group. So there was André and Pete Mondavi and Bob and Art [Arturo] Merla,* who worked for Mondavis at the time; he's died since then. And Bard Suverkrop, who was the chemist for Beaulieu at the time; he's a retired Air Force officer now. [laughing] And George Deuer, who was John Daniel's winemaker. Who the heck else was in there? Myself. [pauses] That's all I can think of right now. There must have been somebody else in there.

Teiser: Nobody from Sebastiani?

Martini: No, this was only Napa Valley. Nobody from Beringer's was in there at the time that I can remember. Beaulieu, there was André and Bard. And Inglenook, there was--I can't remember whether there was anyone there from Christian Brothers or not, right at the start.

Teiser: Had there been at that time secrecy about technical matters between wineries?

Martini: No, I don't think so. In fact, I was amazed in '50, which was my first trip to New York to see the Finger Lakes district wineries, how much secrecy there was there among wineries that were within a stone's throw of each other, whereas out here the first thing we'd do is let somebody else know if we'd found a new piece of equipment or we discovered something else. As far as I know, there was very little secrecy. Among the technical people it was pretty open.

Teiser: I remember André Tchelistcheff saying that Georges de Latour didn't want anybody in his winery at all.

Martini: Oh, I know; they were a little on the secrecy side, but I think that was, you know, that was the bosses. I think when you got down and the technical people in the plant got to talking to each other, that same secrecy didn't exist. There was very little secrecy. You wouldn't hesitate at all to call up somebody and say, "Hey, I'm having a problem here. You got any ideas?" And they'd tell you if they had any. You know, "Why don't you try this or try that or try something else?" Or, "Yes, we had that problem last year, and we seemed to clear it up by doing this." Among the technical people I thought it was very good.

*Arturo Merla, who worked first at C. Mondavi & Sons and later as manager of the Beaulieu Vineyard winery, died March 21, 1960.

Martini: I was appalled how it was back east--of course, they were much older wineries and had been operating for a long time--because I'd go and visit one winery in the morning and go to another one in the afternoon, and the guys in the afternoon would quiz me on what kind of equipment the one in the morning had; the place was only down the road a little ways and all they'd have to do is go down and look. [laughter]

Winery Innovations and Daily Routine, Latter 1940s

Teiser: When you came back here then, in 1945, what did you do immediately?

Martini: Well, the first thing I did, as far as I can remember, was that I got the lab set up, which wasn't much until then.

Teiser: You said you started sort of doing it in '41.

Martini: Yes, but my dad hadn't really used it very much. He'd used it only for blending, but he hadn't done any of the analysis. So I set the lab back up, and I set up a system of records that I could follow; he wasn't much of a record keeper either. [laughing] And those were the first two things that I did. Then I just slowly started, you know, taking over some of the winemaking responsibilities.

Teiser: When you speak of "records," what do you mean?

Martini: I mean cellar records. He had a lot of chicken scratches running around on pieces of paper. And I set up also a system where all of the movement orders that went out to the winery went as movement orders, not orally. He did everything orally. He never wrote anything down to speak of, and if he thought about it three days later, he'd say, "Oh yeah, I better keep a record of this," and he'd write it down. [laughter] And I was a little bit more concise than that. I wanted things written down and I wanted them in order, and also I wanted to make sure the guys out there understood what the movement orders in the winery were. And I tried to set up a system that could be checked easily, you know, and rechecked. So that was the first thing that I did.

Then I just started doing the daily work. You know, I'd pick up the samples, run the analysis, make some of the blends--I'd started making some of the blends--and get together with my dad

Martini: On making others, and things of that nature. And we'd get out to the vineyards a little bit; of course we only had a couple of them at that time. And did whatever else had to be done, anything from driving a truck to whatever came up that no one else had time to do; we didn't have that many people around here.

Teiser: Did you have a winemaker?

Martini: No.

Teiser: You were it? your father was and then you were?

Martini: Yes. No, we've never had a winemaker that's actually responsible for making the blends and doing the winemaking who was outside the family. We've always kept it in the family. It's always been my dad or I, or Mike, who's doing it now. That may be bad, but nevertheless that's the way it is. [laughing]

Teiser: Your wine has a family taste!

Martini: Yes,

Teiser: I assume your father was glad to see you back to share some of the responsibility because the business was growing, was it not?

Martini: Yes, it was growing fairly well. I don't recall [the figures] in '45, when I came back. The first figures I can remember were in about '47, and we were selling around 25-30,000 cases a year then. A lot of it though was not varietals. A lot of it was standard burgundy and chablis, and Mountain Red and Mountain White, and that type of wine; maybe 60 percent was that. It was mostly Monte Rosso.

"Mountain" Wines and Vineyard Locations

Teiser: That word "mountain," were you the first to use it on your label?

Martini: I think so, and the reason we used it was because we had the Monte Rosso vineyard over in Sonoma. We used to call the varieties from there Sonoma; we used to put out a Sonoma Zinfandel and a Sonoma Sylvaner and so on. And then BATF came along and said, "You can't do that because the winery is in Napa County, and even though the grapes are grown in Sonoma County, you have to have both the winery and the vineyard in the same county in order to use

Martini: an appellation of origin." So then we went to "mountain," and we did that for a couple of years, just straight "mountain"; we had Mountain Barbera, Mountain Zinfandel. And then they came along and they said, "You can't do that because Mountain doesn't mean anything as far as an appellation goes, you've got to put California on there." So then we went to California Mountain, and we used that label up until fairly recent years--ten, twelve years ago--when we eliminated the "mountain" because everybody else was coming out with their cheapest wines as mountain wines, and we decided that there wasn't any advantage in keeping mountain on there anymore.

Teiser: How in the world did that term migrate so? Most of the "mountain wines" came from the flattest of lands, didn't they?

Martini: Oh yes. I don't know how the name migrated, and why people thought it was such an attractive term. If they hadn't thought it was attractive, they wouldn't have put it on their labels.

Teiser: It calls up visions of vineyards growing up a hillside.

Martini: Yes, it calls up visions of higher quality. But we decided there wasn't any point in using it any more because most of the cheap wines on the market were the mountain wines.

Teiser: That brings up the whole question of hillside and flatland vineyards. I guess everyone was told early on that grapes that grow on hillsides where they have to struggle make the best wine. (Am I oversimplifying that?)

Martini: Well, I think that's probably true. I'm not so sure whether it's so much that it's because the grapes have to struggle as it is that you've got usually better drainage on hillsides and you generally have better exposure, especially if you're facing the south. But we find that it's true; the grapes that come off our mountain vineyards seem to have a different balance and they seem to have a little more elegance to them than the grapes that come off more fertile soils in the valley.

Teiser: But in the Napa Valley an awful lot of the land is pretty nearly flat.

Martini: Well, that's true, but it's still Napa Valley. You know, a valley is supposed to be flat. [laughing]



Louis M. Martini Winery
Ca. 1983

Photograph courtesy of Martini Winery



Monte Rosso Vineyard, Sonoma Valley
1960s

Photograph courtesy of Martini Winery

Teiser: But a lot of the grapes that come off that flat land in the Napa Valley are very high quality.

Martini: Oh sure, they make good wines. My feeling is that the texture and the elegance of the wine is a little different if you grow it in the mountains than if you grow it in the valley; that doesn't necessarily make it better, but it does make it different. It depends. If you want a big, intense Chardonnay, like a lot of the ones that are popular now, the big, oily kind of Chardonnay, they generally come from the valleys, from the richer lands. The ones from the mountains are usually much lighter and much more delicate. It's just a question of style, which style Chardonnay you want to make as to where you're going to get your grapes.

Teiser: The Carneros area is flat, isn't it?

Martini: Reasonably flat. It's got rolling hills. It's not flat like a valley.

I think the distinctions in the valleys and the mountains should be not whether the thing is rolling or steep, but whether the soil is a deposited soil from your river going through the valley and has a lot of richness in it, or whether it's a type of soil that's been eroded and does not have the richness in it. I think that's more important than whether it's sitting on a slope or not; that's not so important. Your deposited soils in the valley definitely make a heavier wine, unless you get on the gravelly parts like up against this [east] side of the valley where it's pretty gravelly.

Teiser: Some of the newer vineyards are really on steep hillsides, and their estate-bottled wines I suppose have a distinct flavor.

Martini: Yes. They're different all right. We can generally pick up our Monte Rosso vineyards over other vineyards around the area very easily as a different wine, and we're starting to put them out under a separate label too, as Monte Rosso.

Teiser: I think Donn Chappellet's is all hillside.

Martini: That's right. He's very similar to our Monte Rosso vineyard in location, only except that he's facing Napa Valley and we're facing Sonoma Valley. They're both facing southwest.

Growth of the Winery

Teiser: I suppose that your functions in this winery, from the moment you came back in '45 to the present, changed gradually.

Martini: Everything phased into each other very easily, just like I'm phasing out now in a lot of it. I phased into it in exactly the same way. [laughing]

Teiser: As you phased in, of course the winery grew. Was it your intention that it should?

Martini: It just grew because we had the salespeople out there, and of course you're always pushing for more sales. For a long time we had wines on allocation actually, where we couldn't even supply them, but I think everybody had for a while. But yes, it was our intention to grow, at kind of an even rate. For a while it grew faster than we wanted it to grow, but now it's slowed back down again, so we're about where twenty years ago we felt we would be.

Teiser: Did you make actual projections?

Martini: Well, I tried that and they never worked. [laughing] The reason they don't work is because your salespeople don't sell across the board. They'll take one item and run with it. In other words, if they see an opening to sell Cabernet, or they've bought a lot of Cabernet, if it's particularly good or the vintage of it is particularly good or there starts to be a little bit of a demand, they'll push on that one item, and they won't sell across the board. That's the real difficulty in communicating with the salespeople. We could, say, stand an increase of 5 percent a year if they increased every item we make by 5 percent a year, but they don't; if you get an increase of 5 percent you may have to take it all up by one item, and then you can't stand it, you can't keep up with it. So anytime I made projections, they always fell short somewhere or the other; one thing sold more than I projected and everything else sold less than I projected.

Changes in Public Taste and Wine Styles

Teiser: You can't project public taste, of course.

Martini: That's right. At one time we sold more Pinot noir than Cabernet, you know. Now Cabernet is 40 percent of our sales.

Teiser: Well, of course, Pinot noir got into controversy, didn't it, about what it's supposed to be?

Martini: Yes. And there was a lot of Pinot noir out on the market that was not all that outstanding. We are learning more about it, and I think it's going to come back. It will take a while, but I think it's going to come back.

Teiser: What style are you going to make it?

Martini: Each winery is going to have to set their own style; they're doing that with every other wine anyway. Some are going to make it very heavy, and some are going to make it light and more elegant, but each winery will set their own style, and I think it will slowly come back. It isn't going to do like Cabernet did and shoot way up to the top, but I think it'll be in a better position in the future than it has been in the past.

Teiser: I've been surprised that your Folle blanche hasn't zoomed, or has it?

Martini: No. The main reason, I think, that it doesn't zoom, or that we don't sell more of it, first is the fact that it's a white wine and we're not very strong on white wines. But in addition to that, we're the only ones making it, and whenever you're the only one making a product, not enough people know about it.

Teiser: I should think that Folle blanche would have caught the public's imagination.

Martini: Well, maybe it would have had we had the means and the resources to make it attractive to them; in other words, advertise it, promote it, and so on. But you've really got to do that if you want to get anywhere.

Teiser: Dr. Richard Peterson recently described a wine as "reminiscent of the pre-1970s Cabernet sauvignons of the Napa Valley." (It was a Monterey Vineyard Cabernet from San Luis Obispo County.) What did he mean by that?

Martini: He probably meant it was not quite as heavy and robust as many current Cabernets and was a bit more delicate and refined.

Teiser: You've continued more interest in red than white wines, have you not?

Martini: Yes, well, because we've had our sales more in red than white wines; they're also a lot more fun to make! [laughing]

Teiser: I see you have a Chenin blanc. I didn't realize it.

Martini: Yes, we make a dry Chenin blanc.

Teiser: Have you tried to not make too large a range of wines?

Martini: If we look at our past history, we've found that many of our increases have come along when we've added another wine, never when we've subtracted a wine. In other words, subtracting one wine from the list does not increase your sales in the others necessarily, for some reason. So we've found that as long as we can make a distinctive line of wines and keep up with it, our sales probably improve with more items rather than with less items.

Teiser: Many people who try to make one or two wines say: "Oh, the trouble is that sales people want a whole line."

Martini: Yes. And you also never know when the public's taste is going to change, and if you're out there with the one wine that the public's taste suddenly changes against it, you've got a problem.

Teiser: Is Chardonnay continuing to increase in popularity?

Martini: It's still increasing, yes. The supply of it has gotten so much better than it was that it's not so difficult to get grapes any more, but the demand for it is still increasing.

Teiser: I thought that the combination of its price and some other competitive white wines might work against it.

Martini: Well, at our price level, ours is still increasing. Now some price levels that may not be true.

Teiser: That's a wine, however, that you've been interested in for a long, long time, isn't it?

Martini: Well, we've made it for a long, long time, yes. We've really only recently though started getting some good vineyards and good grapes. It wasn't until we got the Healdsburg vineyard [Los Vinedos del Rio] that came into bearing that we really had any good grapes of Chardonnay.

Adding Winery Facilities and Equipment Since the 1940s

Teiser: The winery here has grown physically since 1945, has it not?

Martini: Yes.

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Teiser: I was asking you about the expansion of the winery and if you could trace its growth.

Martini: When we first started, the main building was all we had, and up until about '55 that was it. Everything was done in there: bottling, fermenting, everything. In 1955 we expanded to provide a new fermenting room, out in back. Then, about ten years later, we expanded our facilities off on the side here for storage of additional case goods, just a case goods warehouse. That was about '65. Then, in 1970, we built a new office and lab and tasting room. Then, in 1975, we started in on another warehouse for tanks and case goods, and that's where we are now.

Teiser: I can remember the first time I came to this winery--many years ago-- the tasting was in the winery.

Martini: Yes, we just stuck a table in a corner of the winery.

Teiser: Yes, and your father was out there hauling cases around.

Martini: Yes.

Teiser: It was just delightful. [laughter]

You have added and refined equipment, have you not?

Martini: Oh, quite a bit. All our fermenting room now is stainless steel, with the exception of a few of the old concrete fermentors that we put in in '55 that are still there. But all the wood is gone from the fermenting room. We had wood fermentors originally. We just had tanks that we took the tops off of and used for the fermentors.

Teiser: Redwood?

Martini: Redwood, yes. And we've eliminated all those. We don't use those at all anymore.

Teiser: What was so bad about redwood fermentors anyway?

Martini: Well, they're too hard to keep during the off-season, was the main thing. First of all, they dry up on you and you've got to resoak them. Besides that, it's awfully hard to keep the insides of them sweet and keep them from going bad. During the off-season, that's one of the worst problems. But they're hard to clean even during the season. Compared to a well-painted concrete fermentor or stainless steel, they're very hard to clean. And the other problem too is that you can only go one way in them, whereas in the stainless steel tank you can use it for either red or white. And you can jacket it. All our stainless steel fermentors are jacketed now. There're just so many advantages to it that it isn't even funny. It makes life much easier.

Teiser: The concrete--

Martini: Concrete works fine too except that generally on a concrete fermenter you have to refrigerate when you pump over in order to cool your wine, whereas on the stainless fermentor you just have a cooling jacket, and we turn on a thermostat and that takes care of it.

Teiser: Was there any refrigeration here in this winery originally, in the 1940s?

Martini: We built the cold room in 1941. No, wait a minute, we built it before that. Oh yes, that was already built in 1941. We build the cold room shortly after my dad built the regular winery, the main building.

Teiser: And what did you use that for then?

Martini: We used it for detartrating, and we used it for fermenting white wines in.

Teiser: That was advanced for that time, was it not?

Martini: Well, refrigeration for detartrating was generally used. Not very many people fermented white wines that cold though, at that time. I think that's one thing that my dad kind of was a pioneer in, was using very cool temperatures for fermentation. And we always had a lot of refrigeration, even for red wine fermentation; we used either tower water, or when the tower water wasn't enough we used to buy ice, five tons at a time, and dump it in there, in the cooling water.

Teiser: So cold fermentation was not invented yesterday. [laughing]

Martini: No, no, not really.

Teiser: What else then? I suppose filters have changed tremendously, haven't they?

Martini: Not tremendously. We're still using diatomaceous earth filters and pad filters. We use Millipore now for white wines, which were not used in those days. But other than that, the filtration part is not too different. Well, and we don't use asbestos at all; for twenty years we haven't used asbestos. But asbestos used to be one of the principal filtering media, and it's still the best. And I still don't think there's any danger in it, but you don't dare use it because you don't know when [the] Food and Drug [Administration] or somebody is apt to ban it and quarantine all the wines that have been filtered with it.

Teiser: It was asbestos fragments, was it, that they thought--

Martini: Yes, but nobody has ever shown that ingested asbestos fragments have done anybody any harm; it's all been because of the breathing of them through the lungs. And they've also been able to show that asbestos fragments break up so small that they can hardly be filtered out.

Teiser: Not through Millipore?

Martini: Not even through Millipore can it be filtered out, although if you get down to .45 you can certainly get 99.9999 percent of them, but there's always one that's going to get through endwise somewhere.

Teiser: In the 1940s were they still using rewashable filter pads?

Martini: We used rewashable asbestos pulp when I first came back from the service. Now that's one that I think probably did contribute some bits of asbestos particles. But it was not a satisfactory system at that time, not because of the particles, but because it was very unsanitary to keep rewashing the same stuff. And you took a chance: if you ran one contaminated wine through you had a good chance of contaminating something else later on.

Teiser: I understand that you yourself have improvised or adapted some equipment.

Martini: Well, everybody adapts some equipment. We're kind of stingy about buying new stuff that we can adapt from something else, and so we make use with a lot of used equipment and things of this nature, but I don't think we've done anything very dramatic.

Teiser: What have you done?

Martini: Well, for instance, a few years ago we needed more refrigeration back in the fermenting room, and the price of a nice, new contained unit brought in looked too high to me, so we went down and found some old tomato cookers and converted them over to heat exchangers, and did buy a new compressor though, one with all the moving parts. But we put together a sixty-ton refrigeration unit for about half the price that you could go out and buy one by doing that. And it's kind of fun doing it. That's part of the fun of running a winery, anyway, doing some of these improvisations.

Aging Wines

Teiser: What about containers for storage, have they changed?

Martini: Well, we haven't bought any redwood recently; we've gone primarily to oak, some barrels and some tanks, but we do feel that oak is a better aging medium, especially for red wines.

Teiser: Have you changed your techniques and practices at all for aging wine?

Martini: Really not too much, other than we're aging more wines in oak than we used to. The only other technique is that for some wines we are using--and we're still experimenting with this--barrels for a limited amount of the wine and then blending back into wines that were aged in larger oak cooperage to try and get some hint of wood in it but to try and control the wood character more than if you put everything in barrels.

Teiser: A man from Italy I know said, "Your wine tastes as if it were made by carpenters." [laughing]

Martini: Yes, there are some wines that are that way.

Teiser: Italians visiting here used to say they tasted redwood, that redwood ruined the taste of California wine.

Martini: I think brand-new redwood probably would, but once it's aged it doesn't have any effect on it; I can't taste any redwood in wines. And usually the redwood tanks are so big that your surface-to-volume ratio is small compared to the contact with wood. Now if you made small barrels out of redwood, then you probably would have some problems.

Teiser: This winery tends to age wines longer than most, does it not?

Martini: I think we usually are about a year behind everybody else, yes. [laughter] On the market. I notice that, that everybody will be having the '79s out, and we're still working on '78, things of that nature.

Teiser: Do you pay any special attention to bottle aging?

Martini: Yes, we try and give all our red wines at least six months before we ship them out, and some of them get more than that. The ones of the larger quantities, like Cabernet, get six months. Some, like Barbera, which is a smaller quantity, we'll probably bottle up the whole lot at once, and that's a year's supply; so some of it will be six months and some of it will be longer. We won't try and put it out before it's at least six months in bottles, and we have enough storage for that.

Right now our case goods in storage almost equals our yearly sales, when our case goods are at their peak, which is usually the end of July inventory. Now in December they're down because of heavy draw during the holiday season, but we usually come in the vicinity of 250,000 cases of wine in bottles in storage.

Laboratory Work

Teiser: I suppose your lab has been refined over the years?

Martini: Yes, we're doing a lot more lab work. Mike has hired a girl now that does quality control, and she takes bottles off the line periodically; we never did that before. We never had time really, because I didn't have time to do it and we didn't have anyone else to do it. But that's her primary job. Another fellow there that's Mike's assistant helps with translating a lot of our orders back to the cellar and keeps the cellar records.

Teiser: Do you do any purely experimental work for the future?

Martini: Mike does a little bit on fermentation techniques, managing the cap and things of this nature, and he's got some wines that he treats differently and then pulls out a small amount and sees how they develop. But that's about all we've been doing on that.

Teiser: Have you relied over the years a good deal upon the university for experimentation?

Martini: Yes, usually they're far better equipped for doing experimentations than we are. If we did experimentations of any very technical nature, we really don't have the equipment to run the analysis of all these various things that they're now talking about. You know, you've got to have a spectrophotometer, and you've got to have a, what do you call it, a gas-liquid chromatography setup, and that's very expensive equipment for a small lab to have. Our lab is simply set up strictly for a quality-control lab for the winery.

Teiser: Have there been innovations that have come to you from the university, notable ones?

Martini: Yes. Right offhand it's hard to think of what they might be, but in the vineyard area there've certainly been a lot of them, all the way from clonal selections to new crosses. And then in the winery area there have been too, but right now I can't think of what they are.

Teiser: I'm sure you were using controlled yeast fermentations from the beginning.

Martini: Oh yes, sure.

Malolactic Fermentation

Teiser: How about malolactic fermentation?

Martini: We have such an infestation of malolactic bacteria in the winery that we just don't need to do anything about it, and it happens to be a good strain, so it just does the job. We check for it to make sure the job is done, but we've almost never found one that has not gone through by spring anyway.

Teiser: So what control you have over it is just done with temperature, is that right?

Martini: Yes, temperature and SO_2 , and we try not to build the SO_2 up too high so that it goes ahead and finishes. And then we do check, we monitor the tanks regularly to see what stage they're at.

Teiser: Do you go directly from first fermentation into the malolactic, then?

Martini: Sometimes it goes with the last stages of alcoholic fermentation, sometimes it doesn't go till the following spring, sometimes it goes directly, like you say. We don't really care how it goes, we just monitor it to make sure we know what stage it's at, that's all. It doesn't make much difference to us whether it goes initially or whether it goes a little later. We want it to go, however, on red wines; we don't want to leave anything behind that hasn't undergone malolactic.

Teiser: How about white wines?

Martini: Whites we try not to encourage it. Once in a while we get one that does take off on it, but most of the times they do not undergo malo-lactic. We keep the SO_2 up on them.

Teiser: You're fortunate then?

Martini: Well, you know, if you're starting a brand-new winery, you're starting with everything new--new tanks, new barrels, and everything--you've got to do something about it because you simply don't have the organism around in large enough numbers to get anything started. But when you've got a winery that's been in a place for fifty years, and you're using the same cooperage, there's just no way you can really control it and clean up that cooperage so that you don't have anything in it. So if you've got the right strain, you're lucky. If you've got a bad strain, you're unlucky. And that's about the way it works.

Teiser: You'd have to change your cooperage?

Martini: Well, if you have a bad strain in the cooperage then I think you would inoculate to try and get the fermentation over with as quickly as possible before it gets a chance to grow spontaneously. But as long as we've got a good strain and the malolactic seems to come out all right, we just let nature take its course.

Changes in Bottling##

[Interview 3: January 11, 1984]

Teiser: I noticed in a 1952 article, a description of what seemed to be essentially hand-bottling and hand-labeling in this winery. Was it really?

Martini: Well, not completely, but compared to what we have now it certainly was by hand. Until 1958, we used what is called a siphon filler. I don't know if you've seen one, but it's just a tank with a bunch of siphons on it and you hand-place the bottles on it; you end up looking like you're milking a cow. You place the bottles on it and take them off by hand. We used a hand corker; you put the cork in by hand and push down on a handle.

Teiser: So you corked one at a time?

Martini: One at a time, that's right. We then would take the bottles and set them on little wagons--little rolling tables is what they really were--and moved them over to a bottling line where a girl would pick up the bottle, clean it off if it had any spilt wine or anything on it, because hand fillers were not like the automatic one; there was no suction unit on it and they spilt wine occasionally if it foamed over.

We would then hand-clean it, hand-wipe it, let's say. It would be shoved down the table to the next person who would set it on a little stand and put one label on. It would be shoved down to the next person who'd set it on a stand and put the back label on. And sometimes there was a third person if we happened to have a neck label, which we did until the late forties. We had a little button [button-sized label] that put the vintage on. And then it would go to the end of the line where it was wrapped in tissue paper and cased.

Teiser: Was there a capsule?

Martini: Let me think now a minute. Where did we put the capsules on it? The capsules were put on on the rolling tables, and then each bottle was taken off the rolling table and put through the squeezing machine for the capsule, by hand, one at a time, and then set on the table, and then it went on to be labelled.

Teiser: Heavens! Then you went to automatic bottling.

Martini: Yes, we got that in '58, and we were able to cut the bottling crew from about fourteen to five.

Teiser: Have you had to replace the bottling equipment you got then?

Martini: No, we're still using the same line. It's still working fine.

Teiser: You don't have a sterile bottling room, do you?

Martini: No. We have the bottling room right in the middle of the winery. We've never moved it. We have plans for building one in a new warehouse when we get around to putting the warehouse up, but that's a few years away yet.

Teiser: What's the advantage, actually, of a sterile bottling room?

Martini: Well, the advantage is that you can put up wines that have residual sugars, whereas we can't.

Teiser: Like Moscato Amabile?

Martini: Well, Moscato Amabile is okay because we keep it refrigerated, but more like 1½ or 1 percent white wines, or 1½ or 2 percent white wines, which are very popular actually.

Teiser: Do you make them?

Martini: No, we don't make them. We don't make them because we haven't the facilities for bottling them, so there's no point in making them.

Teiser: You were a little primitive, little late, weren't you? I mean didn't you go on being primitive a little longer than some? [laughter]

Martini: Well, we've always been primitive. On stuff like that, we seldom lead the pack.

Grape Varieties and Varietal Wines

Teiser: Now as to changes in the vineyards. Do you want to start with varieties? I have a list of grapes you grew in 1952. September, 1952. [reads] Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot noir, Pinot Chardonnay, Johannisberg Riesling, Pinot blanc, Gewurztraminer, Folle blanche, Zinfandel, Sylvaner, and Gamay. I think all in your own vineyards.

Martini: Okay. We still have all those varieties with the exception of the Pinot blanc; we don't have any Pinot blanc. But we still have all those varieties, although we're not putting all of them out as varietals anymore.

Teiser: I don't know that you were then.

Martini: Well, the only one that is really not there anymore is Sylvaner. We still have the grapes, but we don't put out a Sylvaner anymore.

Teiser: That's too bad. I like Sylvaner.

Martini: I agree with you, but the public didn't apparently, or at least didn't like the name, and so they didn't buy it.

Teiser: But I suppose that the proportions of the plantings that you had then have shifted somewhat.

Martini: Oh, considerably, yes. Let's see, in '52 we had very little Pinot noir; now we've got oodles of Pinot noir. Actually, in '52, we didn't have too much Cabernet either. But then of course our sales have shifted considerably since then. The big change has probably been that I think in '52 Pinot noir was our most popular red wine. We sold more of that than we did any other varietal, and today we're selling far more Cabernet than any other varietal.

Teiser: You make Pinot noir in the traditional burgundy style still?

Martini: Well, I'm not sure what that is. [laughing]

Teiser: Oh, that's right, the old burgundy style, not the new burgundy style. [laughing] The heavy style.

Martini: Well, we make it as heavy as we can make Pinot noir; it's never going to turn out as heavy as some of the other varieties, but we do try to make it medium- to heavy-bodied. We really don't make any wines with these exceptionally heavy, inky characters; we try and keep away from that.

Teiser: Did your Pinot noir increase mainly as a result of plantings in the Carneros?

Martini: Yes, in fact that's where we've got all of it now, with the exception of a small block up in Healdsburg. But everything else is in Carneros.

Teiser: I think André Tchelistcheff said he and your father who really had faith in Carneros for Pinot noir.

Martini: I think that's right, yes.

Teiser: Was it planted very little when your father and Beaulieu went in there?

Martini: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, back in the late forties, right after the war, there was very little true Pinot noir around the country. At that time a lot of the Pinot noir, including ours, was made with a very high percentage of what we now call Pinot Saint-George because some of the people thought it was Pinot noir and they sold it as Pinot noir. In fact, I would say, back in '45 and '46, almost any Pinot noir on the market, with the possible exception of a few people like maybe Martin Ray or someone like that that had very small quantities, was probably Pinot Saint-George. Inglenook had some Pinot noir that I recall, and I think BV [Beaulieu Vineyard] had some Pinot noir. We had very little, and we depended mostly on Pinot Saint-George, and I think most of the other wineries did too.

Teiser: Now almost no one makes Pinot Saint-George.

Martini: That's right. Well, we still have some grapes, but we use it for burgundy.

Teiser: I think Christian Brothers makes a varietal wine from it.

Martini: Right, yes. And Inglenook used to. I don't know if they still do or not. Inglenook used to call it Red Pinot at one time, and they did make it, but I'm not sure whether they've abandoned it or not.

Teiser: How did you get the true Pinot noir, then, to plant in the Carneros area?

Martini: Well, we finally discovered the differences between the two, and we started looking for some Pinot noir, and there were blocks of good Pinot noir around. Inglenook had some blocks, which were mixed, and we had to go in and do some selection work and get out budwood of stuff that was the true Pinot noir. But with the help of the university and Dr. [Harold P.] Olmo in particular, we did pick out these better clones of Pinot noir and slowly started building them up, and that's where our grapes came from that we have now.

Teiser: It's interesting to me that while various wineries are relatively competitive--I'm sure that you feel yourself a little competitive with Inglenook now--you all trade vines and probably trade wines from time to time and so on.

Martini: Oh well, we sell wines to each other all the time in bulk; if we have surplus wine we put it out available in bulk. That's the long-established practice in the industry, and I suppose that's true in almost any industry that they'll do that.

Teiser: And you also use each other's vines.

Martini: We get budwood and things like this from each other all the time. I think the general feeling in the industry had been that that's good for the industry in general is good for me. So if we can improve the whole industry--whether it's by helping somebody introduce a better clone of a grape or get a new grape variety or even share technology and stuff like that--if it enhances the whole industry, it's going to help you out sooner or later. And after all, you know, with the exchange idea you receive as much as you get; it doesn't all come from one place.

Teiser: I wanted to ask about another variety here. I just had a bottle last night of Joseph Heitz's Grignolino. Was it used much in blending just after Repeal?

Martini: I doubt it because there wasn't very much around. Joe's got a little block of it here, and there may be a little bit at the growers' level, but I don't think there was very much around then. I think most of the wines after Repeal were made from Zinfandel, quite frankly, that were any good at all to drink. Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Carignane: those were the three varieties that were in most abundance.

Teiser: They made so-called burgundy?

Martini: Yes, just made a red wine.

Teiser: I suppose other varieties have been moved around in your vineyard, the way Pinot noir was?

Martini: That's right. We are now getting to the point of where on the ranches that we have had for twenty years or more we are limiting new plantings and replacements to two to three or at the most four varieties. Most of Napa [the Carneros area vineyards] is Pinot noir

Martini: and Chardonnay, and all new plantings are going to be Pinot noir and Chardonnay, and maybe, if it becomes popular enough, some Perlot in one block.

But we used to have Zinfandel down there at La Loma, we used to have Mondeuse, we used to have Tannat; we've gotten rid of all those. We have a small block of Pinot Saint-George left, and that's going to be the next one to go. And the Cabernet doesn't do well enough often enough to merit keeping it on that ranch. Now the other ranch, the Las Amigas Ranch that we have, which is down on Las Amigas Road, is closer to the bay and is a little more moderate and it ripens about a week earlier than the Stanly Lane Ranch [La Loma]. So that Las Amigas might do at least for Merlot, and maybe even some Cabernet. But right now it's all in three varieties: it's Pinot noir; what we call Gamay Beaujolais, which is a clone of Pinot noir; and Chardonnay.

And then the Napa ranch, which we call La Loma Ranch, also in the Carneros, that one we're limiting pretty much to Chardonnay and Pinot noir. There're some experimental blocks of Riesling, Traminer in there. The Traminer, we might expand that someday if we ever need any more Traminer, but the Riesling I don't think I'd plant it down there again because it simply doesn't ripen well enough. And we've gotten rid of all of the lesser varieties, with the exception of Saint-George.

Teiser: Did you plant Merlot earlier?

Martini: The first Merlot we planted was in about 1964, after we had acquired the land up at Healdsburg. We originally planted it with the idea to see if we could make a Cabernet blend that was a little more complex and maybe matured a little sooner than our regular Cabernet, straight Cabernet, did. And then after we got it, we decided that it made a nice and distinctive enough wine that we ought to put it up separate, in addition to blending it. We still use it for blending with Cabernet, but we also sell it straight.

Teiser: It's become popular.

Martini: Yes, it's becoming more popular all the time.

Teiser: How long have you been producing Merlot as a varietal?

Martini: The first one we put out was in 1971. That was a blend of '68 and '70 wines. And then in '72 we put out a straight 1969. In '68 we didn't have enough to do more than make a 500-gallon cask,

Martini: and in '70 we had such a bad crop that again we only had enough to make a 500-gallon cask, so we blended the two together and made one wine out of it. And that was the first one. I think that was the first Merlot on the market. I think it was followed shortly by Sterling; they came in a few months afterwards. But I think we actually beat them on getting it on the market, although we weren't even aware they were making one at the time.

Teiser: Barbera is one of your specialities, isn't it?

Martini: Yes. There aren't too many wineries I don't think making Barbera. In the coast counties there aren't too many grapes of Barbera available. From the San Joaquin Valley there are more grapes available, and we use some coast grapes we have planted up in Sonoma, and we do a little blending with San Joaquin Valley grapes because the coast Barbera is almost too acid; it's very high in acid and it tends to be tannic without being heavy. So it needs a lot of blending. We've always blended Petite Sirah and Gamay with it. One tends to soften it up a little bit, and the other gives a little more body to it than it has by itself.

Teiser: Why is it so inexpensive?

Martini: Well, because the grapes are a pretty good producer. You know, it's not a great wine in the sense of Cabernet or Pinot noir--it doesn't have that much flavor or that much delicacy--but it ages very well. Some of the best real old wines, forty-year-old wines, that I have at home are old Barberas rather than old Cabernets.

Teiser: Where does your Zinfandel come from?

Martini: The best and most of it comes from our Sonoma vineyard [Monte Rosso], although we have a good planting of it now out in Chiles Valley [on the Glen Oak Ranch]. We needed to expand Zinfandel because nobody was planting Zinfandel here a few years back; everybody was planting Cabernet.

It got so the Zinfandel got very high-priced (well, reasonably high-priced, considering the crop it puts out) for trying to keep it a kind of mid-price-range wine; it was getting very difficult. So we decided to expand our vineyards on Zinfandel when we got the Chiles Valley place, and they do quite well there. They make a different wine than Sonoma: the mountain vineyard is more intense and a bigger, more alcoholic wine, whereas this makes a softer, lower-alcohol wine--we don't get the sugar out there that we get in Sonoma. It has a refined flavor, not as powerful as the Sonoma one.

Teiser: Do you blend them?

Martini: We blend them to some extent, yes. We use one to compensate for the other a little bit.

Teiser: I suppose we should speak of Folle blanche, which is yours alone, is it not?

Martini: Well, at least I think we're the only ones that put it out as a label; I think there're other plantings in the state. But Folle blanche just happened to be on the ranch at Sonoma.

I think a pretty good story is that when we first bought the ranch, which was in '37, we were told that it was Sylvaner, and we didn't know any difference, so we started labeling it as Sylvaner. Then, it wasn't until some time after World War II, around '46 or so, that we discovered it wasn't Sylvaner, it was Folle blanche. So we couldn't very well chop off the Sylvaner and end up with nothing to sell, so what we did was that we kept selling it as Sylvaner and planted Sylvaner in the meantime. And then as that came into bearing, we started blending the Sylvaner in with the Folle blanche a little bit more and more and replaced the Folle blanche with the Sylvaner and kept right on with the Sylvaner label, and then started a Folle blanche label, started labeling it as Folle blanche and putting the Folle blanche where it belonged. That was the easiest way to get around it.

Teiser: This is a reaction to consumer expectations?

Martini: Well, yes, I'm sure that we'd have lost our Sylvaner sales all at once if we had suddenly dropped it and started calling it Folle blanche, even though it might have been the same wine.

Teiser: And now is the Folle blanche 100 percent?

Martini: Yes.

Teiser: Are there some others that you have special plantings of?

Martini: No. Right now we're playing with a block of Carmine up on the Healdsburg ranch, but we've only had a token amount of grapes so far.

Teiser: How do you expect to use it?

Martini: Well, I think it's a little bit overbearing to use straight, at least in that vineyard; it might get a better balance and not be quite so heavy in a little warmer area. But up in that Healdsburg vineyard, it's a little overbearing to use as a straight wine. It might make a good blender with Cabernet. It might add to some Cabernets, like special wines or something like this, a little more body and a little more tannin. We have to see first though, you know, how well it ages and what it does. So far they're very young vines and they tend to be overcropped because of their youth, so it's not a very good indication of what the grape will produce, although it certainly will produce a crop.

Teiser: What was the university's intention in creating that variety?

Martini: I think they were trying to create a better Cabernet, that produces more grapes, and they did that all right, and it does have some Cabernet character. In fact, much too strong almost to be alone. But I think for enhancing other Cabernets or even other standard wines, it might be great. But I'd like to wait until the vines get a little older, when they settle down to producing a more normal crop.

Teiser: Have you tried other new varieties or Olmo's?

Martini: I've tried Carnelian, but it was on purchased grapes, and I didn't care much for it. Actually, it was grown over near Woodland, and that might have something to do with it, but I wasn't impressed by the wine it made at all.

Teiser: When you speak of having made decisions about what to plant where, this, I suppose, is based on an increasing knowledge of various factors.

Martini: Well, basically it's based on--since we keep all our wines separate--the quality of the wine and the consistency of the quality that we get off of those grapes from that vineyard, really. We know now that from the Monte Rosso vineyard in Sonoma we consistently get a top-grade Zinfandel and a top-grade Cabernet. So naturally we're going to be planting mostly those two varieties up there.

Teiser: So it's not from theoretical analysis of climates and microclimates?

Martini: Well, that helps a little bit, but that's not really the final decision. The final decision comes from what kind of wine it makes.

Teiser: That takes longer to find out.

Martini: Oh, it takes a lot longer to find out, yes. The analyses will tell you whether you're in the ballpark or not. In other words, we put thermographs out like on the new vineyards and so on to get some idea of where that ballpark is.

Any new vineyard land that we acquire, we'll put in an experimental vineyard of maybe twenty vines of twenty different varieties, and then take a good look at those vines. We're not really set up to make real small lots of wine, but we take them and we analyze the grapes and take a look at the vines and the grapes themselves and taste them and see how we think they would fit.

Then if we think they have some real potential, we'll put in five acres, enough to make a good-sized cask that we can handle commercially. And I don't mind giving up five acres for that purpose, and if it doesn't work out I'll take it out and put something else in.

Like we tried Malbec over in Healdsburg, and it didn't work out, not because the wine wasn't any good but because I couldn't get a crop on the vines, it shattered so badly. We kept it for almost ten years, and then tore it up, and now we've got Chardonnay in that block.

Teiser: Were you using Malbec to blend in Cabernet?

Martini: Well, that was the idea, it was to try and blend it with Cabernet. And it had a purpose: sometimes 5 or 6 percent of Malbec changed the texture of the Cabernet a little bit. But I can't afford to grow grapes that only produce a half a ton to the acre. [laughing] And we used to leave lots of wood on them and get lots of clusters and the clusters had six berries each. So that wasn't very effective.

Vineyard Spacing and Mechanical Harvesting

Teiser: When you plant, are the planting patterns different than they were earlier? Is the spacing different?

Martini: Well, the spacing, we've pretty well gone to a twelve-foot row spacing because of mechanical harvesting and our equipment is set for that now, so we've gone to that. On the more vigorous varieties,

Martini: we might go to twelve-by-seven or -eight, and on the less vigorous varieties we'll go to twelve-by-six. And of course in the mountains we try and plant on the contour to some extent, and when we do that your row widths vary, but we try and stay nine to sixteen feet between rows, and five feet between vines. If we start getting over sixteen, we'll stick a row in the middle.

The major differences in most of our new plantings are that we're trellising everything with a two-wire trellis, and we're not doing any head pruning any more. We're doing either cane or cordon, and I think we may even go more to cordon in the future than we have in the past, we seem to have more success with that.

Teiser: That's for mechanical harvesting?

Martini: Yes. I mean that's the reason for not using head pruning any more is that you can't really mechanically harvest it.

Protection Against Frost

Teiser: Do you use water sprinklers for frost control?

Martini: No, we only have a few blocks where we use water for frost control. The rest of the places we use wind machines and orchard heaters.

Teiser: Do they work?

Martini: Oh yes. They work if it doesn't get too cold, but so far, in the places that we have them, we haven't had a problem with them. If somebody turns them on, they work. [laughter] The worst problem is to get them turned on.

Teiser: But you do use spray somewhere?

Martini: Yes. On the Healdsburg ranch.

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Martini: Our vineyard in Healdsburg is right on the Russian River, and we're pumping right out of the underground flow of the Russian River, so there we've got all the water we need. The vineyard starts at river level, actually at water level, and there's a dike between our vineyard and the river itself. And then from there the vineyard goes up to where it's maybe a hundred feet

Martini: higher at the top of the ranch than it is at the bottom. It's on kind of benchland. It'll go up for, oh, maybe ten, fifteen feet and then it'll level off and maybe you'd have a forty-acre field that's all level and then you go back up another ten, fifteen feet and then another bench. So there're a bunch of benches up there, and those are not as subject to frost as down below where all the cold air comes down these benches and settles down at the bottom. It can't get out because of the levee that's blocking the water from coming in. So there we've got water sprinklers protection. The rest of it we use wind machines, and we don't even need pots up there; the frost incidence is not that bad, so just the wind machines take care of it.

In Napa we use both wind machines and pots; that is, on the Stanly Ranch, the La Loma vineyard. About half the pots are fueled by natural gas--we have a main line going through the property--and the other half are fueled by pressurized diesel fuel from a central location and it's all piped in.

I'd rather have it all by natural gas, but they wouldn't give us that much gas, so we held them up for half of it but we couldn't hold them up for the rest. The reason we were able to even get that was that they wanted to change the location of their main line through the vineyard, so they needed a new right-of-way, and we said we wouldn't give them a new right-of-way unless they gave us some gas. [laughter] So we got some gas out of it. And the balance of the frost protection system is just diesel oil.

Now, the other ranches. Chiles Valley is wind machines and pots again, again on the compressed oil system. And Healdsburg, as I mentioned, is water and wind machines. Chiles Valley does have one block next to the reservoir that we do sprinkle, simply because it's the coldest spot on the ranch; the cold air all drains down to it.

And in Sonoma and Las Amigas we don't need any frost protection at all. And I don't think we're going to need any at the Lake County ranch either. It gets cold there in the winter, but it's not during the growing period.

The Lake County Ranch

Teiser: Where is the ranch in Lake County?

Martini: It's about four miles southwest of Lower Lake. It's on top of a ridge at 2000 feet elevation, which is about 800 feet above the lake level. It's very well-drained soil, red volcanic soil just like the Sonoma ranch; they're very similar type soils. We have lots of water, and a natural spring comes right out of the ground all year long that flows all the way from 200 gallons a minute at its lowest up to probably 500 or 600 gallons a minute during the winter. So we have plenty of water on the place, and we are going to put that into drip irrigation.

Now the Chiles Valley ranch is all under drip irrigation. The Las Amigas Ranch is half under drip irrigation, the newer half; we don't really have enough water to do the whole thing down there. Some day we may get a source of reused water, you know, reclaimed water from the Napa ponds, and in that case then we will be able to put it all under drip.

Drip makes a big difference in your yields and in the time it takes to get a crop on a young vineyard. In other words you can gain a year or two years in getting your first crop by having drip irrigation, simply because the vines grow faster; otherwise they're more stunted.

In Sonoma we don't have enough water at the Monte Rosso for irrigation of any kind. In Lower Lake we'll have plenty of water, and in Pope Valley we'll have plenty of water when we get around to planting that.

Teiser: When did you buy the Lake County vineyard?

Martini: Two years ago.

Teiser: Was it planted?

Martini: No, no, there's nothing on it but sixty-four acres of walnuts. The whole ranch is 490 acres, of which somewhere between 300 and 350 can go into vineyards. The rest of it is not suitable.

Teiser: That's unusual, isn't it, to find that large a block of good vineyard land?

Martini: Well, it just happened to be there. You know, the strange part about that is that it had been at one time a resort, so there's lots of housing on it, lots of old cabins; they're old, as a lot of those Lake County places are, but they're good employee housing. And it's got a couple of houses on it.

Teiser: What was the name of the resort?

Martini: Perini. It was known as the Perini Ranch, and the Perini family had owned it since 1900. They had sixty-four acres of walnuts on it, which we kept. They used to raise vegetables and cattle and so on. It's got about seventeen, eighteen acres of pastureland on it. And we're going to build a lake on it, probably in the next year or two, to capture some of that water. There're a couple of small reservoirs now, but they're not really big enough. So we're going to build a larger lake on it so we can capture some of that water and use it.

Teiser: And do you have plans for varieties there?

Martini: Well, we have a varietal block planted. We planted it this last spring, and we also planted some larger tracts of Barbera and some Cabernet up there so far. Last year we only planted about ten acres because that's all of the disease-free stock we could get. And we're planting each variety on its own root there, because there're no vineyards anywhere near it, and Lake County doesn't have phylloxera yet. So we're putting this stuff on its own roots, and I think the first planting we'll get by with it. Now, thirty years from now when we have to replant the vineyard, we probably won't be able to get by with it; we'll probably have to use [resistant] rootstocks then.

This year we're putting in another twenty acres, which will bring us up to thirty acres: about twenty in Cabernet and ten in Barbera. And then we're going to sit on that for a while and wait till it produces and see what we're getting before we do anything else.

This is all forest land. It had to all be cleared. There were a tremendous number of rocks in it, big rocks, that you've got to dig out with bulldozers. But once it's cleared, it looks like it's going to make good land.

Teiser: What about the Pope Valley ranch?

Martini: The Pope Valley ranch is about 250 acres, about 125 to 150 plantable. It now has 12 acres of Semillon and 24 acres of walnuts on it. We expect it to be a Region III location, suitable for Cabernet, Barbera, and Gamay and some whites. Our plans are to hold off planting this one until we have part of the Lake County ranch planted and producing. It was also purchased in 1982.

Controlling Vineyard Pests and Diseases

Teiser: Speaking of rootstock: when you can get away with it, do you plant vines on their own roots?

Martini: Well, this is the first time we've ever tried it, because up till now we've always had vineyards in an area where there were lots of other vineyards around us so that I wouldn't even bother to take a chance. But I think if you can plant on its own root and get away with it, so much the better.

Teiser: Are you all learning something from the recent phylloxera appearance in Monterey County?

Martini: Well, I don't have any doubts that we'll have phylloxera sooner or later. I just think that if you don't have phylloxera at any given time, I think the first plantings you can probably get away with. I think after that, however, you probably cannot. I'm sure sooner or later phylloxera will get up into Lake County too.

Teiser: Have you standardized what kind of rootstock you use?

Martini: We've pretty much been using A x R #1. The main reason we switched over to A x R #1 years ago was that it was a lot cleaner stock. The [Rupestris] St.-George around had too many diseases, too many viruses, whereas the A x R #1 checked out much cleaner. So we started using that, and we've been kind of sticking to that.

Teiser: Do you have to fumigate soil?

Martini: This is something I'm not sure whether we should do or not. Fumigation has gotten so expensive that unless you really have to, it hardly pays to do it. If we replant, we fumigate; if we've had a vineyard in before, we fumigate. Or if we've had a prune orchard in before, we'll fumigate. But if they're just forest land or virgin land, we don't.

Teiser: Do you have any special disease- and pest-control practices?

Martini: No, other than the normal sulfuring, and we have had occasionally, on certain spots, to do some control like for leafhoppers where they became concentrated in one spot. But other than that we've done very little spraying. I'm not an exponent of going in and just automatically spraying whether you need it or not.

Teiser: Is there a factor in just normal good housekeeping in vineyards that keeps disease and pests down?

Martini: Well, yes. You've got to keep your weeds down, and you can't let them accumulate around the trunk of the vines or you'll start getting bugs that come in and set up housekeeping. And I think just plain, good farming practices will pretty well keep them out. The main thing is, of course, to get good, sound vines to begin with.

Teiser: Where do you get them?

Martini: We grow some of our own. We have a nursery. Our rootstock we generally grow our own, and if we need more we'll buy from commercial nurseries wherever we can find them; you know, nurseries that have a certain kind of stock available.

More on Mechanical Harvesting

Teiser: You spoke of mechanical harvesting in relation to vineyard spacing*--

Martini: We started using mechanical harvesting about 1971, that was the first year when we first bought a machine. One of the big factors in determining that was that we had so much Pinot noir planted in Napa. Pinot noir is very, very difficult to hand-pick because of the very small clusters, and since it was the first grape picked and was ripe ahead of anything else, we had an awful hard time with the pickers. They didn't want to pick it. They couldn't pick enough in a day. No matter what you paid them. Pickers are kind of funny; they like to see the results of their work almost as much as they like to see additional money. So if you pay them twice as much and they pick half as much, they're not as happy as if you pay them half as much and they can pick twice as much.

*See pages 67-68.

Martini: So we decided to get a machine and to get most of that Pinot noir picked, so it wouldn't take so long. Otherwise it would take us two weeks to go through all the Pinot noir. The machine, under our conditions down there, will do the work of about sixteen pickers. We've had them side by side and just about the same number of tons come in hand-picked as machine-picked when we have about sixteen pickers picking by hand. That's at our crop level. Now if you had a bigger crop level, of course it would amount to more, but Pinot noir is not a very big crop, and it's also very hard to pick.

Teiser: How about the condition of the grapes as they come into the winery then?

Martini: There again, we've run experiments on trying to see if we get a different wine from the two, and we either can't tell the difference or the machine-picked wine sometimes is a little darker. And I can see why, because it has longer maceration time because it gets more smashed up. I think that the secret is to get them into the winery, crushed with sulfur in them, within three or four hours. If you can do that, you don't have any problems. If you're going to run them overnight and down through the San Joaquin Valley in 110-degree temperatures, then you might have some problems.

Teiser: You don't do any field crushing?

Martini: No. We don't have long enough hauls, we figure, to merit doing that. If you had a long haul, then that would be the way to go: field crush and add sulfur dioxide right there, and then just bring them in in a tank truck.

Teiser: How about the roads from Lake County?

Martini: Well, Lake County will take us probably an hour and a half to two hours, which is not bad. By car you can make it in an hour, but it is pretty mountainous.

Teiser: Do you pick at night?

Martini: Yes. Where we have the machine, we'll start picking around midnight and pick between about midnight and noon, and then knock off in the afternoon.

Teiser: And hand-picking?

Martini: Well, by hand we have to pick during daylight hours. But if it's a real hot day, we'll knock off about three or four o'clock; the pickers poop out by then.

Teiser: You have still only the one machine?

Martini: No, we've two now. We have one we keep mostly on the Napa ranch, sometimes run it over to Chiles Valley to finish up there. And the other one is up at Healdsburg. And Sonoma doesn't lend itself to [mechanical] picking, it's too mountainous. However the Lake County ranch, I think a good percentage of that will lend itself to mechanical picking. It's mountainous, but it's on top of a ridge, and there are large areas that are reasonably flat on it, with less than, say, a 10 percent grade.

Teiser: Drip irrigation doesn't get in the way of the mechanical harvester?

Martini: No. The hoses that you stretch across are below the area where these strikers hit.

Major Vineyard Advances

Teiser: Are there any other factors that we haven't discussed in relation to the vineyards, as they've changed or as they are?

Martini: No, I can't think of too much. I think the three probably biggest things to hit the valley are: one, irrigation in almost every place; and two, frost protection by water or some other method. Twenty or thirty years ago there wasn't any frost protection, so a lot of these places that are growing grapes now could not grow them at that time simply because they'd freeze every year and you'd end up with half a crop.

Teiser: Why was there a change in irrigation?

Martini: Well, with the drip system coming in. Almost everybody now has some sort of irrigation. There are very few really new vineyards anywhere that are strictly dry-farmed any more. Even in Napa, on the Stanly Ranch, where we don't have any water, we developed a reservoir and are picking up enough water that we can start putting drip irrigation on the new plantings. I don't think it would do much good to try and go into a twenty-year-old vineyard

Martini: and put drip irrigation in there. I think the roots are established differently, and I doubt if it would help. But I think it's well worth it on the new plantings because when the vines are young is when they get the maximum benefit of it.

Teiser: You said there were three major changes--

Martini: The mechanical harvester is the third big change.

Martini Winery Practices Today

Teiser: What percentage of your grapes do you grow and what do you buy?

Martini: It changes from year to year because of the crop level. If we have a small crop, we have to buy a little more. If we have a big crop, we can buy a little less. But generally it's running around 60 percent of our own production, and 40 percent we buy. And when we get our new areas planted--it will be ten or fifteen years before they're all bearing--we'll probably be up to around 80 percent of our own production.

Teiser: Do you buy grapes from other areas than the North Coast valleys?

Martini: Right now we buy grapes only from Napa and Sonoma Counties. In the past we have used grapes from the Central Coast areas and if needed we would not hesitate to use those varieties that blended well with ours from these areas. We have not purchased grapes from the Central Valley for many years.

Teiser: What about wine? Do you buy much wine?

Martini: No, recently we haven't bought any. Years ago we used to buy some, and most of that was bought for our standard wines. We never bought any varietals, to speak of. Once in a while maybe one tank or something, but very seldom.

See, our business has changed, purposefully, over the last, well, ten to fifteen years. We used to sell about 60 percent nonvintage, generic wines--like burgundy and chablis and Mountain Red and Mountain White--and 40 percent vintage, varietal wines. And now we're selling 80 percent vintage, varietal wines and 20 percent of the other. So our requirements are completely different. We have more requirements for the varietal grapes, far less requirements for standard wines.

Martini: In fact, our standard wines are generally now made up from what's left over from our varieties. If Cabernet has a bigger crop one year than you need, you're going to have 20-30,000 gallons left over it, so that's blended up with something else and made into burgundy. So we really don't have to go out and buy wines any more.

Teiser: What about jug wines?

Martini: Well, we've stopped putting out all jugs, as you know jugs. The only thing we make in a larger container now are magnums. And magnums are in two categories. There's the burgundy and chablis, which have generally kind of replaced the jugs. And then there's the Cabernet and the Pinot noir and the Chardonnay and so on, which are priced exactly the same as that in bottles; there's no advantage in buying the magnums over buying the 750 ml., except the advantage is that if you plan to age them, they'll age better. But there's no real advantage on a cost-per-ounce basis. The popular-level wines we do price down a little bit in magnums.

Teiser: Do you still make a chianti?

Martini: Yes. That's only in 750 ml.

Teiser: What do you use in your chianti?

Martini: Oh, most of those wines, like chianti and claret, that we make are mainly Zingandel. Again, they're a different blend of the leftover wines. In other words, for burgundy we'll put more Petite Sirah in it and more of the heavier varieties, more Pinot noir if we have any left over, and all the Pinot Saint-George. What we try and do on the burgundy is to keep out Zinfandel because it's so dominant in character, and blend the other varieties together. We try and put all the extra Zinfandel in the chianti and claret and Mountain Red. And then we blend them to give them the different degrees of lightness or heaviness simply by the blends we make; they're the same wines, but they're intermixed differently is what I'm trying to say.

Teiser You yourself do the blending?

Martini: Well, Mike does most of it now. I did it until the last couple of years, but since then he's been doing most of it. I check them and taste them before we do the actual final blend--you know, taste the lab blends--but he does the blending pretty much. He's doing most of the winemaking actually now.

Teiser: That's wonderful, isn't it?

Martini: Yes, it's great except that I'm not doing the part that I like the best. [laughter]

Distribution of Martini Wines

Teiser: Maybe your distribution today might be discussed in relation to the "21" Brands and Parrott & Co. You started early on in this winery distributing through Parrott & Co.?

Martini: We started right after the war. Some time in I think 1946 we gave our wines to Parrott, for the seven western states only; "21" Brands had it back east.

During the war, "21" Brands bought out the Frank Schoonmaker line of wines that he was distributing. He was our first distributor back in the eastern part of the United States. Then he went in the service, and the company kind of folded up and wasn't doing anything, and "21" Brands bought their distribution rights from them for the eastern part of the states,* and we retained it for California and the West; apparently my dad did it on his own at that time; he was selling directly to wholesalers, and he had a few wholesalers.

Then, during the war, I met John Menzies when we were both in the service. He mentioned at the time that after the war was over, he would come up and see us, and I had forgotten all about it; I wasn't paying any attention to the business then.

Teiser: He was with Parrott & Co.?

Martini: He was with Parrott & Co., yes. So after the war--sometime in '46; I don't know just when it was--he came up and talked it over, and we decided to give them our distribution for the seven western states instead of doing it ourselves. And that's how we got with them in the first place. So we've been with Parrott now since 1946.

We stayed with both companies until about 1972 or '73. Foremost then bought "21" Brands, and it became part of a big conglomerate of Foremost and McKesson.

*See also page 37.

Martini: Well, they really were not doing a good job for us back east. They really were not that interested in wines; they were interested in the Scotch whiskeys and cordials, everything else they were distributing, but they really had no interest in wines.

And Parrott at that time had just separated from another distributor and had lost a number of the whiskey lines. So our wines and Wente's wines were the primary items that they had to sell. They had a few other smaller lines, but we were the primary items and constituted a high percentage of what they were selling.

See, Parrott ran actually two companies: the liquor department and a kind of a grocery department; that is, a wholesale canned goods type grocery setup. John Menzies ran the liquor department and Bob Menzies, his younger brother, ran the other department. John wanted to sell Parrott & Co. because he was getting old and he wanted to retire, and Bob wasn't so crazy about selling his part of it, but at any rate it was one company.

So they were looking around and so on, and Karl Wente and I got together and we said, "Look, if they sell to another conglomerate, we're going to be right back where we were with "21"; it's like working with the Pentagon working with some of these outfits. You never get answers. They never call you back. You don't know who to put the finger on if something goes wrong." So Karl says, "Why don't we buy it? Just the two of us, and maybe include Johnny Gallagher," who was at that time the vice-president, but he was really running the company. He was the guy that really knew the ropes as far as running the company, although John Menzies made the policy and so on. So we got together with them and we arrived at a figure and bought them out. Then we included Gallagher in it, so the three of us had a third each at that time.

Just before we did that, however, when "21" was falling by the wayside, we asked Parrott if they were interested in taking the line for the whole United States, because they had never distributed throughout the whole United States. They had only distributed on the West Coast before. And so they thought, yes, that they would. And we thought, "Well, what the heck have we got to lose? They know our wines. If they do a good job, fine--"

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Martini: So they took it, and they were successful, and then it was about two years after that or so that we decided to buy Parrott out, and it took another year of negotiations and yak-yak and whatnot to finalize it. So we finally ended up with Gallagher and Wente and us owning Parrott.

Martini: And then about two years ago--Gallagher is my age, he's sixty-five, and he's thinking of retiring in a couple of years--he wanted to get his interest out, so we and Wente bought him out. So now Parrott belongs to just the two of us, the two wineries.

Teiser: Who runs it?

Martini: Oh, Gallagher still runs it. He's employed, as he was before, that just went right on.

Teiser: So you don't have to manage?

Martini: No, no. I wouldn't know what to do. [laughing] I don't know anything about sales.

Teiser: Suppose something happens to Gallagher, then what?

Martini: Well, we have another man. We have a national sales manager now.

Teiser: You have other people in Parrott?

Martini: Yes, we have other people in Parrott that are coming up. And we have an executive committee which is made up of Gallagher and Eric Wente and I that periodically get together and discuss policy and so on as far as Parrott is concerned.

Teiser: So it works out?

Martini: It works out.

Teiser: Is that an unusual arrangement for wineries?

Martini: Well, it works out pretty well. I think Christian Brothers has a similar arrangement with Fromm and Sichel now that they've bought them out. Our two companies always had a similar arrangement in that we had a primary distributor.

Teiser: Do you think that's a trend?

Martini: Well, there aren't too many companies that have a primary distributor. A lot of them just do their own distributing in-house. We've always felt that we really didn't want to build up our own staff that big. And it gets very expensive out there in the field. Unless you know what you're doing and you've got the right men, you can pour a lot of money into that distribution end.

Teiser: Are any of the younger members of your family interested in sales particularly?

Martini: No, not too much. It still works out well to have I think a separate company doing it.

Teiser: So all of your wines go through Parrott?

Martini: All of the wines sold domestically, yes, in the U.S., go through Parrott. Except what's sold at the winery. And we sell a little bit to private customers by shipping and so on; that doesn't go through Parrott. But anything that goes through a wholesaler goes through Parrott.

Teiser: Yes, I notice you have in the tasting room an order form.

Martini: Yes. We reserve the right to sell direct to consumers, but anything that goes through the trade goes through Parrott.

Teiser: Your pricing in the tasting room: I suppose it has to be equal to the highest at any retail store.

Martini: Well, our pricing in the tasting room is set at what the normal store markup is of 50 percent. I mean that's the highest that you should have to pay anyplace for it. Otherwise we'd be undercutting the stores, and we don't really want to do that, because we need all the help we can get out there. [laughing]

Teiser: I suppose people who are constant consumers don't buy at the tasting room.

Martini: No, those that use a lot of wine I think are all using the Liquor Barn or these discount warehouses and stores. The wine is the same, you know. It's not quite the same as the grocery store where one might have better fruit and vegetables than the other. Wine that comes in a bottle is going to be the same; it doesn't matter who's got it.

Teiser: Do a lot of the people who come to taste also buy?

Martini: Oh sure. I think we figured out one time we average about a bottle a person in sales for the people that come here. Yes, it pays for itself, the operation, including the wines that we give away tasting. So if it does that; that's pretty good costless promotion.

Making Clonal Selections

Teiser: You mentioned earlier the beginning of your work on clonal selection.* Would you continue discussing that?

Martini: Well, there isn't an awful lot to discuss. We did some work back in the late forties and early fifties in cooperation with Professor Olmo, and picked out some individual clones of Pinot noir out of the Inglenook vineyard, Chardonnay out of--where the heck did we get that?--I guess our Sonoma vineyard and also McCrea's [Stony Hill] vineyard up here, and some Riesling out of our Sonoma vineyard, and made some clonal selection blocks down at Napa [in the Carneros area] out of it, and kept very close records. The university actually kept close records on it for the first ten years or so of the vines' existence and took samples and made small lots of wine and evaluated the wine, and they have all the information on the different clones.

But we did manage to get some clones out of there that were superior clones. A couple of them--I think the Chardonnay and the Pinot noir--that are generally in distribution in the industry now came from those blocks, after they were cleaned up of viruses by the university, using their heat treatment techniques. And that basically is about all we did with the clonal selection. Of course in planting our own vineyards and expanding our own vineyards, we used some of the better clones as well.

Teiser: You went out in the vineyard and found the best variety?

Martini: That's exactly what we did. I'd go out in the vineyard, then I'd mark the vine so that I could go back to the same vine, and then we usually budded about forty vines of each variety.

Teiser: When would you go out and select the vine?

Martini: We'd select at the time the fruit was on, in August, just before picking.

Martini: We'd mark the vine and then we'd get the bud wood after the wood was ripe. At the time the wood is ripe, the fruit is still on the vine, so you can evaluate the vine for type, productivity, freedom from disease, and taste [of the fruit].

*See also pages 20-21.

Martini: It's the same as I did with selecting the Gewürztraminer clone. I noticed, when we had the Gewürztraminer in Sonoma, the bud wood originally came from the university, that some fruit had a very intense flavor. I have a habit when I go through vineyards of eating all the time, and I noticed some vines had a very intense flavor and other vines did not, although everything else looked the same: the vines looked the same, the leaves looked the same; I couldn't tell them apart.

So when we put the block in Napa, which was a small block, I went around and got the wood from only those that tasted intense. I tried to find vines that had a reasonably good crop, but if they didn't have the intense flavor I skipped them, no matter how good the crop was. And we did concentrate that clone--it's probably more than one clone, it isn't a single clone or anything--the more highly-flavored groups in that Napa ranch, and then we used the wood from the Napa ranch to expand it on up to Healdsburg. And that's, I think, one reason our Gewürztraminer has such a strong "Gewürzy" flavor to it.

Teiser: You keep the residual sugar down in it?

Martini: We let it ferment to dryness, yes. And sometimes we've had to blend it with either Riesling or Sylvaner to try and cut that strong flavor a little bit, because sometimes it's just too powerful. But that's basically the work that we did on clonal selection.

Teiser: Just common sense more than anything.

Martini: That's exactly right.

A Family Enterprise

Teiser: Is the ownership of the winery in a family corporation?

Martini: Yes.

Teiser: All family-owned?

Martini: Yes. We operate actually as two companies. We operate some of the vineyards that we've acquired more recently as a separate corporation, which we call Edgehill Farms, Inc., and that was

Martini: started in '62.* Then the Louis M. Martini Company--which is the one that my dad started, and we actually incorporated in 1947; before that it was a personal thing--that company owns the La Loma vineyard and Monte Rosso. And the other company owns the rest of the vineyards. It's all in the family except that there's a different split of stock between the two companies; our children own far more of Edgehill than they do of Martini.

Teiser: I should ask you some vital statistics. When were you married?

Martini: We were married on the first of March in 1947.

Teiser: And your wife's maiden name.

Martini: Her maiden name is Martinelli.

Teiser: She didn't have far to go.

Martini: No, she didn't even have to change her initials on her luggage. [laughing]

Teiser: And your children are--

Martini: Our oldest daughter is Carolyn. She was born the fifteenth of December in '47. And then the next one is Michael, and he was born twenty-three months later, November 7, 1949. And the next one is Peter, and he was born about twenty months later, July 6, 1951. And the last one is Patty, and she was born about twenty months later, February 7, 1953.

Teiser: So you had a whole bunch of them in school at once.

Martini: Well, we sure did, yes. I guess we never did get all four in high school at once, I think that they just missed by one year. There were four of them within a five-year span almost, because Mike and Carolyn were twenty-three months apart, and because of the education division date they were only one year apart in school.

[Interview 4: January 17, 1984]##

Teiser: When did you become president and general manager?

Martini: I think that was in 1968, and, you know, it was strictly a formality. It didn't make any difference in what any of us did.

*See page 36.



Louis P., Patricia, Michael, and Carolyn Martini
January 17, 1984

Photograph by Ruth Teiser

Teiser: Did your father's death in 1974 make a difference?

Martini: Yes, to some extent, although for the five or seven years before his death he really wasn't very active. He would come around, but he never really accomplished very much. Before that time he did quite a bit. He used to like to handle the vineyards a lot; that is, oversee, kind of, the vineyards. And he used to do a lot of the PR work.

Teiser: He said in his interview that in 1965 someone asked him about buying the winery, and he asked you if you wanted to stick with it, and you said yes, and he didn't sell.

Martini: I don't remember that specifically, but chances are that it's probably true because that's what I would have said if he had asked me, and I think he probably did, but I can't recall the incident.

Teiser: Were there many inquiries about selling the winery?

Martini: Yes, between '65 and, say, '72 or '73, there were lots of inquiries, lots of people came around and wanted to purchase the winery. Eventually they either got discouraged with the wine industry or they got discouraged with us continually saying no, and they never bothered us any more.

Teiser: Now your children are in the firm. There's your son Michael; what is his position?

Martini: Well, Michael is the winemaker now, he actually does the winemaking. He handles the fermenting room. Now he's making the blends, and my role in that has got down to simply passing on them or making suggestions, but that's about it.

Teiser: Did he taste with you the way you tasted with your father?

Martini: Yes. For the first couple of years we did it together, and we would make blends together, and then I let him slowly make more and more of them, and we'd go back and correct them. Then in the last couple of years, he's just been making them; he can do as good a job as I can, there's no question about that.

Teiser: He's a very fast learner.

Martini: Well, he seems to enjoy that phase of it very much and he likes doing it and I think he's done fine. I mean I go back and taste his blends and I'll go back and taste the original wines that he

Martini: made them from, I can't see where I would have done it any different, or if I had done it different, I couldn't have done any better, and sometimes probably not as good. [laughing]

Teiser: You have two daughters in the winery.

Martini: Right, yes. Carolyn is the one that joined us first. She handles mostly administration, and she's been handling PR and that type of promotion and work as well. But we're going to turn that over to somebody else as soon as we find somebody.

Teiser: And your other daughter is--

Martini: Pat. And she's done accounting work, and she's taking over in the accounting department.

Teiser: Well, that's a good team you've raised.

Martini: Yes. Yes, it's really worked out pretty well. All we need is a vineyard superintendent now in the family and we're all set. [laughing]

Teiser: And your other son isn't interested in it?

Martini: Oh, I had that notch laid out for him, but he wasn't interested.

Teiser: Three out of four successes is pretty good.

Martini: Yes, it's better than none. [laughter]

Teiser: Well, you have one son-in-law; perhaps you'll have another who'll be the vineyard superintendent.

Martini: Well, maybe. Yes, we have one son-on-law, and he's an attorney. Well, he isn't handling our account. We still have a San Francisco attorney do that, but he comes in handy once in a while on local things.

Teiser: Do you see these young people taking the winery in any direction that is new?

Martini: Oh, of course they're young and they're ambitious. Sometimes I get the feeling they want to take it faster than it should be going in some directions, like these new labels and so on it's been mostly their idea. In fact the labels were designed by Mike's wife Cathy. She's an industrial artist, although she's not

Martini: practicing now; she's just taking care of the kids. But we had some industrial artists in the city design some new labels. We felt we needed a change in the labels a little bit and had them designed. We didn't like any of them; we ended up liking hers better than any of them, so we took hers. That's one change that they've made.

Mike is making quite a few changes, experimental changes, in small lots of wine, and putting them out as small lots, and some of the vinification processes, and so on. So there'll be some changes, there's no doubt about that.

Teiser: When you have a small lot, do you have any way of testing it on consumers?

Martini: No, not really. We taste it ourselves, and what we are going to be doing with some of these small lots, if we're trying a technique that we might want to expand on to the others, we'll probably send it to one market and see how it goes there, like into LA or into San Francisco, rather than try and spread a small quantity all over the United States and everybody gets five bottles or something.

Teiser: Your tasting room is no good for that, is it?

Martini: It's too confusing over there. The only way you could do that would be to ask some people from the tasting room to, say, come into the conference room and taste separately, but to try and get any evaluation in the tasting room, it's too confusing; it's too much of a mess on weekends. You might do it during the week, but we have never really done it. A lot of times these small lots of special vinification, the differences are not that great from the regular wine; there're subtle differences that under tasting room conditions would be pretty hard to pick out.

Teiser: Does the university consult with you at all?

Martini: When we ask them to, yes, oh sure. If we get into trouble with wine production problems or spoilage problems or something like that, we use them a lot.

Teiser: It's interesting that Michael is attempting innovation.

Martini: Well, you know, I would expect him to, because I attempted a lot of innovations when I first came in, and then I settled on my way of making wines and so on, and when you bring in a new winemaker

Martini: you're bound to do that. That's one reason we want to keep it in the family; we don't want a new winemaker more often than every thirty years. [laughing] If we can help it.

Teiser: You've got some grandchildren coming along?

Martini: We have three grandchildren.

Teiser: Do any of them look like winemakers?

Martini: Well, at four and two and three months, no. I don't think I looked much like a winemaker until I was pretty old either. [laughter]

You know, there must be something about this industry because the industry does draw a lot of their children back into its fold, in one way or another. If you look at lots of the wineries around us, they are that way.

Teiser: More now than for a time.

Martini: Right. You know, right after World War II, it didn't look like it was going to be all that great. Now it looks like a more successful business than it did at that time.

Martini Special Bottling and Labels

Teiser: May we discuss your winery's special bottlings and vineyard selections? In earlier years I believe you did very little of that.

Martini: Yes, that's right. We always did a little. We always had--well, I say always; since the late forties anyway--we've had what we call Special Selection wines, where we held out part of them and gave them additional age and also made specific blends. And in more recent years, in fact very recent years, we have gone to this Vineyard Selection--

Teiser: I have in my notes that that was done in 1981.

Martini: Yes.

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Teiser: You said you had occasionally put out Vineyard Selections.

Martini: Yes. We've put out some Zinfandel from Monte Rosso, for instance, in the past, with the Monte Rosso name on the label, and that's primarily the main one. I think we put out one from the La Loma vineyard once before, but there're very few; maybe a half a dozen at the most that we've put out. Now we're doing it with a lot more consistency. And there's a good reason for that. The main reason is that we have these various vineyards now planted into their second generation of grapes, and we've got the grapes we want on them. So we have enough wine made from these grapes that we can set part of it aside for a Vineyard Selection.

We wouldn't bother to put it out if we didn't feel it was a better wine than, say, the regular label. But we have a better wine, and we have one that, you know, we can age longer and get more money for it.

Teiser: Yes, I think you mentioned that people had complained--dealers and so forth--that you didn't have expensive enough wines.

Martini: Yes, so we thought we'd give them something more expensive. [laughter]

Teiser: It's working out well, is it?

Martini: Well, we've just got started with it, so we really don't know how well it's going to be selling, but we have such small quantities that selling shouldn't be a big problem.

Teiser: Do you have to have special labels printed?

Martini: Well, it's more expensive. What we're doing now is that we're printing the labels for each batch of wine, rather than before we printed up a year's or two-years' supply of labels and then kept using them on succeeding batches, maybe put an overprint of vintage date on them and an overprint of a different variety, but we printed up lots of labels. Now we're just printing the labels for each batch, on these special wines.

Teiser: Have you been having your labels printed by the same company for many years?

Martini: We changed a few years back because we weren't completely satisfied with the quality control that the original company was doing, and now we're having it all done up here in St. Helena, at Herdel's Printers.

Martini: We used to have a Berkeley firm do it, but they weren't keeping good enough quality control on our vignette, which is a three-color print process. When you looked at the individual vignette, they all looked fine, but when you got them on a shelf lined up, they looked different.

We now have settled on three labels, basically. We have the regular line, which is a label that's been modified from our regular label but still looks very similar to it. We have the Special Selection line, which is a completely different label than our regular label. And then we have the Vineyard Selection line, which is again a different label from either of the other two.

Teiser: Do they have a family resemblance?

Martini: Slightly. Well, they have a family resemblance in the terminology, but not so much in the appearance.

Teiser: They don't have the same vignette?

Martini: No, they don't.

Teiser: The printing company that makes your labels must be a fairly substantial organization.

Martini: Oh, they do a lot of labels up here. I think they do a lot of labels from other wineries as well.

Wine Judgings and Recommendations

Teiser: In 1958 your father wrote a letter to the San Francisco News* explaining why they weren't entering wines in state fair judgings. He had two reasons: there were too many complex factors for the judging to be valuable; and also wines entered weren't always generally commercially available. Do you enter wines in fair judgings much now?

Martini: We started again; basically, this is the kids' idea. I still agree with those original thoughts that my dad had on it, but they seem to feel that in order to get the publicity and to get mentioned

*It appeared in the issue of June 16.

Martini: that you better go, and if you don't get anything, okay, but if you get something, at least you've got something to talk about, and your salesmen have something to talk about. And that, as far as I'm concerned, is about the only value that the fair judging has. I really, on a quality basis, don't think that they're worth very much. Oh, sure, they'd throw out bad wines and so on.

But my problem with fair judgments is--I have several problems. One of them is that at any fair the wines are always judged out of the context from which they should be used, which is with food. And technically you can make a lot of comments about them, and you've got a group of wines, all of which are good. Then when you start picking the best among the good, it's very questionable as to whether this isn't opinions on a matter of style more than it is a matter of quality. And lighter wines and wines that are generally palatable at the time that they're put on the market really stand a very small chance of winning anything against what we call blockbusters.

And you can't blame the judges for this. It's just the nature of the affair. I would probably do the same thing if I had a whole bunch of wines and really couldn't find anything wrong with any of them, but some were lighter than others and more elegant and I would prefer to drink them, but I'd have to pick this [other wine] as the better wine, simply because it had more of everything: it had more character, it had more this and that, and so on.

So that's why I don't think they mean very much, overall. And nobody's going to turn bad wines into the fair. If you've got any kind of a winemaker at all, he's not going to send bad stuff there.

And also I had some real reservations that, out of any class of ten wines or twenty wines at a fair, if you were to take the top five or six whether you could really show that they were statistically different. Yet there'll be a gold and a silver and a bronze and an honorable mention, and from a practical standpoint, who gets all the commotion? The one that gets the gold gets all the commotion.

Teiser: Yes, I should think a bronze would be a kind of demerit. [laughing]

Martini: Well, that's right, it's almost a demerit. Or in other fairs where they don't give medals, but rate them as one, two, three, four, five, who wants to buy wine number four? Good heavens, there

Martini: are three wines that are better than that, you know! [interviewer laughs] It's misleading, and the general public I don't think sees this.

Teiser: I understand from publishers of wine publications that the general public likes to be told that this is a good wine and you should buy it.

Martini: Yes, I think that's probably true. But, you know, it seems to me that it takes a tremendous amount of ego to go out and put out a publication and tell people what they should and shouldn't be drinking, based on your taste. I couldn't do it. I certainly couldn't go out and tell you what you should and shouldn't be drinking. I could tell you which wine I think might be best, but it certainly doesn't necessarily mean that that's the one you're going to like. Because a lot of times, if I'm judging wines, a lot of the wines that I think are best are not the ones that I like, but not too often.

Teiser: So you know the spot that people are in.

Martini: Yes, I can see the spot that the judges are in on that sort of thing, because you have to be completely objective when you're judging, but that doesn't mean that that's what you like to drink.

Louis P. Martini's Evaluation of His Contributions

Teiser: You have characterized your father's tastes and your tastes and your general attitudes. Can you just say what you think your major contribution to this winery has been so far?

Martini: Well, I guess the fact that we're still in business. [laughter] I don't know, I really can't see where I've contributed an awful lot other than trying to keep an even keel and maintain the quality. Well, we have expanded the vineyards; that's been most of my doing. But other than trying to keep an even keel in the business and maintain us on a sound financial basis, I can't see where I've contributed all that much to it, to tell you the truth.

Teiser: Someone told me that your contributions to the wine industry as a whole had been to keep it on an even keel and on a sound basis financially.



Photo left:

Louis P. Martini, about five years old. Photo courtesy of the Martini Winery.

Photo below:

Louis P. Martini tasting in the winery laboratory, ca. 1975. Photo courtesy of the Martini Winery.



Martini: Well, maybe I'm the type of person who just tries to keep things pretty much on an even keel. I think the fact that we've increased sales and expanded has just been part of the industry; I don't think we did anything particularly to do it. We kept from doing something that would deter that, but I think that we didn't do anything to promote it.

Teiser: However, lots of wineries that were in the same situation as this one when you came into it, haven't expanded and maintained quality and maintained reasonable price levels.

Martini: I think maybe what we have done is that we've operated the plant in a manner to achieve our goals and not cared too much of what other people have done. In other words, other people can increase tenfold, other people can put out sweet white wines if they want, other people can do what they want. We have the very definite, basic belief that wine is made to go with food, and that the wines that are traditional wines--like the dry wines of Europe and so on--are traditional for only one reason: that's what the people prefer eventually when they start drinking wine. And so we've stuck with simply trying to make traditional wines.

III ACTIVITIES IN ORGANIZATIONS

The American Society of Enologists

Teiser: You became active in the American Society of Enologists at its formation?

Martini: Yes, the American Society of Enologists was formed in 1950. It was formed due to the efforts primarily of Charlie Holden, from the Peralta Wine Company in Fresno, who came around and talked to a group of the technical people that were in the industry, one by one, and asked us what we thought about starting a scientific society of enologists and viticulturalists.

I thought it was a good idea. I thought there was a need for something like that. Primarily he was interested in raising the scientific stature of an enologist. I was more interested in seeing an organization that would, say, turn out a journal that would consolidate the technical literature on winemaking and grape growing so that we didn't have to go to a half a dozen other scientific journals to pick up what's new in the field. I was also interested in seeing an organization take over the annual conferences that had been held and sponsored by the university up until then, and that's what the society did at that time.

Teiser: Papers were given at that first meeting?

Martini: Oh yes. Well, I was talking about the meeting of what turned out to be the board of directors, first, at the Hotel Wolf, but they did organize enough that year to take over the meeting at Davis, I think. Let me check. [goes to refer to materials] Yes, 1950 was when they took over the first meetings, and the proceedings of 1950 to 1953 were published during that time.

Teiser: Did it actually, then, immediately draw papers that would have gone, say, to the American Chemical Society journal and others?

Martini: Yes, that's right.

Teiser: What have been its major accomplishments?

Martini: Well, one of them has been consolidating the papers into one journal, which has made them more readily available to the people in the wineries. The other one is, of course, the annual conference, where you get to know your colleagues and get to talk to them and exchange ideas. And the third is the exhibits at the annual conference, where you get a chance to see new developments and equipment and techniques and so on, and talk to the people that have developed them, and have them for sale; and you also get a chance to look over a lot of machinery that you otherwise wouldn't really get a chance to see. Some of it is European, but so far most of it has been American equipment. The Europeans have just come in in the last couple of years with some of their equipment. Not in the same sense of some of the big enological fairs that they have in Europe, where they really have tremendous displays of European equipment. They have come in here to some extent in the last few years, and I think they would like to come in stronger. But it's going to be up to the society. Most of these places have just so much room for exhibits, and we've got about 150 now, and if we start letting the Europeans in, where they want lots of square footage, I'm not sure there's going to be room enough for everybody.

Teiser: Don't the exhibitors pay for the space, help support the conference?

Martini: Oh sure, that's right, so that financially the society is in very good shape now. I can remember way back when it wasn't. I remember the year that I was vice-president and in charge of putting the conference on, the first year that we left the university campus for our conference, and we went to Asilomar, which was a very nice ground and so on, but the society at that time was so poor, you might say, that we had a hard time making ends meet and coming out at the end of the conference with a balanced budget.

That was also an interesting place to hold a conference because we had contracted to hold our conference there, we discovered that Asilomar was dry, and that we wouldn't have any wine on the property.

Teiser: What did you do?

Martini: Well, we had our lunches without wine, and for our annual banquet we moved it into town and I think went to the Mark Thomas Inn in Monterey.

Teiser: The requisite for membership in the organization caused some discussion, didn't it?

Martini: Yes, the requisite for membership at the start of the organization caused a lot of the discussion. There were basically two factors. There was one group that wanted to keep it on a fairly scientific basis and have at least a minimal bachelor's degree requirement for regular members, and there was another group that, in order to get more bodies in the society, was willing to expand the membership to include other people in the wineries.

Fortunately, the group that wanted to keep the academic requirements won out, so that at that time, when it first started, the society membership requirements for a regular member were a bachelor's degree in a subject useful to enology or viticulture and five years' experience.

Teiser: You were on the board from the beginning?

Martini: Yes, I think I was. I think I was right in with the ones that founded it at the start.

Teiser: And you gradually moved up and up till you became president? Did they have a succession of officers like that?

Martini: Only through the vice-presidency, I think, at that time. Now I think it goes further down the scale. Right from the start almost, the vice-president was in charge of putting on the conference, and then the next year he became president and the new vice-president would put on the conference. So my term of presidency came in 1956.

Teiser: What were your functions as president of the organization?

Martini: Not as much as they were as vice-president. [laughing] The vice-president does all the work because he's got a conference to put on, and the president pretty much just has the board meetings and, you know, makes sure that the other people are doing their jobs; that's about all that you really have to do.

Teiser: When you were president though you presided over the conference, I assume.

Martini: You presided over the conference and you presided over the board meetings, and you did check to make sure that the vice-president and whoever was in charge of exhibits and all that sort of thing were doing their job.

Teiser: Does the president have any control over the publication?

Martini: That's really more handled by an editorial board, which the editor of the journal is in charge of. And it really, at least in those days, wasn't that closely tied into the presidency or anything, and I still don't think it is too much, other than naturally you would have influence because you could bring up at the board meetings anything that you disagreed with, and of course the editor would have to go along with what the board said. The board passes on most of these things, but not on papers; individual papers are passed by an editorial board.

Teiser: You were given the Award of Merit of the ASE in 1981. Your father had been given it earlier.

Martini: Yes, I got it about ten years after he did.

Teiser: It was said to be the first time that father and son had both won the same award.

Martini: Yes, that's right.

Teiser: Are you still active in the organization?

Martini: Well, I'm on a couple of committees. I've been on the award committee for several years. The award committee also picks out the guest lecturer, or whatever they call it; they have a name for it. And I've been on the editorial board ever since I can remember, practically.

Teiser: You have to read all the papers?

Martini: No, no, no, we have a lot of reviewers that read the papers. [laughter] Basically, the board itself simply meets usually once a year and reviews everything that the editor has done in the past year and any changes in the format of the journal. Generally, it's a policy organization. I don't review any papers. Once in a while somebody sends me one to look over, but not very often.

Teiser: The organization is nationwide now, you say, and international?

Martini: Well, it's always been international, but now it has a chapter in the East, and with Dr. [A.C.] Rice from New York, who I think is the one that's heading it up, or at least he was. They have their own conference back there, although many of them attend our conference out here as well. But they have their own conference, and they talk over their problems, which sometimes are quite different from people growing vinifera in other parts of the world. Their grapes are different, their climatic conditons are different; their problems are really quite different.

The Wine Institute

Teiser: You have been active in the Wine Institute since the early fifties also.

Martini: Yes, in the early fifties is when I started getting a little more active in the Wine Institute, and I started originally through being a member of the Technical Advisory Committee, which in part was something like what the society does now. It would present papers, and I think we met either three or four times a year; I can't recall now. But it got to be such a large and rather unwieldy group that it was more like a conference than a committee that advised. We still have the Technical Advisory Committee at the Wine Institute, but it's a much smaller committee now; it's maybe a dozen people or something like that, and it does advise. It takes on problems and sees what can be done about them and advises the board of directors or the executive committee of the institute what should be done about them, whereas the other one was too big to really function well.

Teiser: It had a Wine Institute staff member attached to it, didn't it?

Martini: That's right. It had a Wine Institute staff member on it, and it turned out a lot of publications within the Wine Institute which were an in-house type of publication.

Teiser: Didn't it do things like sanitation studies and--

Martini: Well, it would discuss these things. The institute itself didn't do any of these studies, but it would call on people to talk about their experiences and what studies they had done. It was basically a forum for exchanging technical ideas among the technical people in the institute.

Martini: The society took over the more scientific side of this, and the more practical side has been taken over by this organization called WITS, which is Wine Industry Technical Seminar, or Symposium, I guess; they changed their name recently, now they call it Symposium. And it was sponsored by Wines and Vines and several other people. But it's doing a lot of things the Technical Advisory Committee of Wine Institute used to do when it was a big committee.

Teiser: Does it overlap with the ASE?

Martini: Not really; the papers are quite different. The WITS papers have a much more practical aspect to them, and ASE has a much more scientific aspect to it.

Teiser: What other committees have you been on in the Wine Institute?

Martini: I think I've been on almost every one that they have, and at one time or another I think I was chairman of most of them. Just offhand, I've been on the Medical and Social Research Committee, or whatever they call it; I've been chairman of the Laws and Regulations Committee and the Viticultural Research Committee; I've been on the Scholarship Committee; on the Wine Quality Committee; and two or three others that I can't really think of. I have not been on the Economic Study Committee, and I don't think I've ever been on the By-laws Committee, and some of these.

I'd say I've been on all of those that are involved at all with production problems, and not necessarily with other problems. Well, the Laws and Regulations Committee might be the exception to that, although it's very much involved with production.

Teiser: What do you consider the main value of the Wine Institute?

Martini: Oh, the main value, I suppose, is to offer a collective voice for the wineries of California, at both the federal level and state level. To my mind, some of its most important functions are really dealing with governments of other states and the federal government.

Teiser: Does the Wine Institute deal with other organizations? For instance, a winemakers' organization in New York state and other such groups?

Martini: I don't think it has up until John De Luca came in as president. He has been trying to solicit some of the other organizations on a more cooperative basis that have the same goals as the Wine

Martini: Institute, on specific problems. I don't think there's any attempt at all to try and get together and merge with any organization or anything of this nature.

Teiser: You were chairman of the board of the Wine Institute long ago now; '66 and '67, I think.

Martini: I think that's right, yes.

Teiser: What were your functions then?

Martini: Oh, other than running the meetings--the board of directors, the executive committee, and the membership meetings--the main function I found was that I tried to attend most of the meetings of committees so that I'd know what was going on when a recommendation came up to the executive committee or to the board of directors, and I wouldn't be caught flat-footed. Then the other main function was simply to be kind of advisory to John De Luca who was actually the day-to-day operating president of the institute.

He was new on the job--he'd only been there about six months when I got there--and I felt that my function was more to guide him and try and stay in the background and let him get accustomed to his job and start setting his own pattern in the institute than it was to come forward and attempt to put some policies of my own into it. My feeling is that the chairman is only in there for a year, and he really can't change things very much in a year without upsetting everything, so the best thing he can do is guide, and if there's something he really feels needs changing, make suggestions for change and this sort of thing, but you can't go in and do like you would in a business and turn the whole thing upside down.

Teiser: I wonder if every chairman attends all the meetings.

Martini: Oh, I don't think they attend all of them, but they attend a number of them. I wanted to be sure that when I got to an executive meeting I wasn't faced with a bunch of surprises.

Teiser: I remember John De Luca, giving a talk at a Wine Institute luncheon, described an event with you and Mrs. Martini when he was being considered for the position. He was very amusing about it.

Martini: You heard that story, did you? [laughter] Well, at the time that he was being considered, I thought it would be nice if the executive committee members from Napa and Sonoma Counties, all of

Martini: them, would meet the guy. So we asked him up one day for a barbecue luncheon on a Sunday and we asked the executive committee people from up here and their wives over to it also.

We have a deck outside our dining room, and we were sitting out there having some champagne before lunch while I was doing the barbecuing. We had recently lost the oak tree that was shading that deck because it just died, so we were pretty much out in the sun, and it was pretty warm. It was in July. And we kept John out there in the sun pouring champagne down, and then we had about three or four wines to have with luncheon and so on.

Joe Heitz was one of our guests that day, and after the luncheon was over and everybody was up standing around, starting to go home, Joe came over to me and whispered and says, "That's our man. He drank champagne for the whole time outside, he drank plenty of wine with dinner, and he didn't have to leave the table once." [laughter]

Teiser: You knew he had lots of stamina.

Martini: [laughing] Yes.

Teiser: Well, I gather that the choice of him was for other reasons too.

Martini: I wasn't on the committee that picked him out, but I gather that he was a real standout among all of the people that applied or that the committee reviewed.

The Wine Advisory Board

Teiser: Would you discuss the Wine Advisory Board?

Martini: Okay.

Teiser: I believe you were on a Tasting Committee?

Martini: Yes. Well, I was on the Wine Advisory Board itself, and then they also had a Tasting Committee that reviewed the work that was done at Davis on new hybrids. We felt, since the Wine Advisory Board funded a lot of that work that was done up there, that the industry members ought to take a look at some of the crosses, at least some of those that reached the finals; that is, they ought

Martini: to take a look at the wines that they made so that they wouldn't get discarded when some of us might think that some of them had some good points to them.

For instance, the tendency at the time was that unless the grape made an outstanding wine by itself, at least as good as or better than already existed in that category, and unless it had some other real redeeming points, there wasn't any point in retaining that grape in the collection any more.

We felt that some of these might have blending possibilities and use in the winery that may not always be recognized by the professors, and that we wanted to take a look at them and see what we had and how it was developing and so on. So that's when the Tasting Committee was formed.

Teiser: Did you rescue from oblivion some varieties?

Martini: We don't know because we got them before they had a chance to be thrown out. But we were afraid that that might happen unless industry people had a chance to take a look at them, and that was the reason that the committee was formed in the first place. And then it also helped the university people as a guide as to what the industry wanted in their breeding programs. And it was very interesting work; I enjoyed it.

Teiser: As a member of the board itself, you just directed its activities, I assume.

Martini: That's right. As a member of the board, and it was a large board, we simply directed its activities and how the money was to be spent that was collected and that type of activity.

Teiser: Were you on other committees also?

Martini: Yes, but it's been a while now and I really can't remember too much. They had, for instance, this Viticultural Research Committee; at that time their Viticultural Research Committee was the one that was passing on viticulture funding, funding for viticultural research, and I recall being on that. And they had several of the committees that were later on, when the Wine Advisory Board dissolved, taken on by Wine Institute.

Teiser: Do you regret the passing of the Wine Advisory Board?

Martini: In a way, yes, because the industry, I feel, could do a lot more if it had those kind of funds available to it that the Wine Advisory Board provided. The problem was that the state was getting too involved in how we were to spend the funds. And if it's going to tell you how you're going to spend your own funds--we considered that they were our funds and the state was merely being paid for administering the program, but they claimed, no, it was state funds and therefore could not be used to attempt to break down state barriers of other states. And that would really be the crux of why we discontinued the Wine Advisory Board.

Teiser: Oh, that specific subject?

Martini: Yes, well, there were other things too, but that was primarily the reason, as far as I was concerned, that if we couldn't use any of the funds to break down barriers to California wines, then there wasn't much point in having the funds; then we'd rather do it on a voluntary basis and do what we want to do with the money.

Teiser: When you speak of the state, I assume we're talking about Governor Jerry [Edmund G., Jr.] Brown?

Martini: Yes, right. [laughing]

Teiser: He was against lobbying? In general, was that his idea?

Martini: That's right, yes. You know, let's say another state wanted to put on a special tax on wines, obviously we would want to lobby against it because that is a barrier to the sale of our wine. Or whatever regulation they wanted to put in that would be a barrier to the sale or the free flow of goods in that state, why, we felt we should lobby against it, and if we couldn't use the funds, our own funds that we collected for that purpose, there wasn't much point in collecting them.

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Teiser: I believe there are some things that the Wine Advisory Board did that I believe are no longer done. For instance, an aerial survey.

Martini: Yes. That's right. I don't think that's done now.

Well, obviously the Wine Institute had to cut out some of the things the Wine Advisory Board had done because even though the institute assessed the wineries the same amount they were paying to the Wine Advisory Board, membership was not mandatory. Italian Swiss Colony--or United Vintners, I should say--dropped out, and that made a big difference in Wine Institute funds. So

Martini: they had to cut some things out, and I guess that was one of the things that went by the wayside. I haven't ever paid much attention to the aerial survey because it doesn't apply to our part of the country.

Teiser: Not even indirectly?

Martini: It was in the [San Joaquin] Valley, but not here. It gave more information on how much of the valley tonnage was going to raisins. That's where I think the primary information came from, whether they were going to have a big raisin lay or a small raisin lay, because obviously, if they didn't lay it down as raisins, it was going to end up in a winery.

Teiser: Are the coastal valleys immune, in effect, to such conditions?

Martini: Not completely, I'd say, but that type of survey I don't think really had much effect on grape prices or anything up here. You either need the grapes from here or you don't; if you don't need them, you're not going to buy them, because they're going to be a lot more expensive than the valley grapes.

Teiser: The Wine Institute had carried out some of the functions for the Wine Advisory Board.

Martini: Oh yes, it carried out a lot of the functions of the Wine Advisory Board.

Teiser: But it is a voluntary organization, and I suppose that there's something valuable in that.

Martini: Well, it can do what it wants with its funds, that's one thing. We never had any trouble until [Governor] Jerry Brown and Rose Bird got up there in Sacramento, with the Wine Advisory Board funds, actually. Then you had to keep closer track of them, and there were some activities that you were not allowed to do, but lobbying was not one of them at that time.

You know, there's no point in promoting wines around the country unless you can break down the barriers that the states put up against you. In other words, if you've got to go against the tide all the time, your best bet is to try and stop the tide.

Teiser: So, by implication the new rules worked against all the promotion that the Wine Advisory Board did, advertising and so forth.

Martini: It was some; it wasn't really all that much, I don't think. Originally, it used to have personnel around the country--this is, oh, way back, twenty years ago or more--but in more recent years they did not have that, they just worked by more or less a centrally located PR program.

Teiser: Do you think that that was a valuable thing?

Martini: I think it had some value, but I think it was still too limited to really have a lot of value. My feeling is that if you're going to do promotion and advertising, you've really got to go at it big, and spend maybe four or five times what we had available to spend, to make it effective. I think we were kind of in the in-between stage of where we were doing a little good, but I'm not sure it was cost-effective for what we were doing. To be cost-effective, we probably would have had to spend a lot more.

Teiser: Any possibility that in the future such a thing could be done?

Martini: I don't know. I doubt if there is, unless business gets a lot better than it has been the last year or two, because most wineries aren't about to go spend a lot of money on generic promotion; they'd rather put it in their own promotion.

What the Wine Institute I think is doing now, its biggest thing, is trying to get like these public radio station wine tastings around the country and this sort of thing, get wine introduced into a lot of these places.

But in an industry that its product is as varied as ours is, it's very difficult to promote just wine as wine. I think it's more effective probably, far more cost-effective, to promote individual brands of wine, and then hope that that spills over on some of the others.

Teiser: The wineries that have pulled out of the Wine Institute--is there any anticipation now that they'll come back?

Martini: Well, John keeps trying to bring them back. Hopefully, some day we can get the Heublein group back. And I don't know what the situation is, now that they've divested themselves of some of their holdings, whether the new Italian Swiss Colony bunch is going to come in or not; I suspect that we might be able to get them back in. But the Heublein group for a while probably will not come back in. The last one I heard that might be leaving is Almaden; that would be a big one too.

The Napa Valley Vintners Association

Teiser: Going on to the Napa Valley Vintners Association, that's an old organization, is it not?

Martini: That was started in 1944, and actually my dad is the one that started it. He got it going by having a luncheon up at our Sonoma vineyard, actually, of just inviting four people up. I think it was he and John Daniel [Jr.] and Louis Stralla and I can't recall who else. Well, I wasn't here, so I'm not really sure who else was there. But that four got it started.

The real purpose of starting it to begin with was in response to wartime government regulations and price controls. They felt that they had to get together and discuss some of these things that the government was wanting to impose on the industry because some of those affected the industry up here far differently than they would, say, affect the industry in the San Joaquin Valley.

The association at that time really started with the idea of having kind of a forum in which the valley wineries--and there were only eight or ten of them at the time--would get together once a month and just have a nice lunch and have some good wines and get to know each other a little better and talk over some of these problems, like price controls during the war, and the labor problem. It was very hard to get labor in the valley; they had to use prisoners of war and all sorts of things for picking season.

That was how it was originally started, and it continued that way really for many years, until the seventies when we started getting more and more members in, and now we're up to seventy-eight. There's a bunch of people that are becoming pretty active in trying to make more of a trade association out of it; that is basically what they're trying to do. We now have an office; we never used to have an office. We now have a full-time executive director, or she's really a part-time executive director.

Teiser: I see recently the association was advertising for a full-time public relations specialist.

Martini: They haven't found one yet. We have somebody running it now, but she doesn't want to be doing it anymore; it's more work than she wants to do. Julie Dixon--it used to be Julie Chapman--who was one of the attorneys for Wine Institute. She married someone

Martini: from up here and moved up here on a ranch, and she took on the job as part-time executive director of the organization, and she's doing fine except she doesn't want to spend as much time as is needed.

Napa Valley Wine Promotion

Martini: Some of the vintners want more activity and promotion of Napa Valley appellation, for instance, and they want more activity in getting involved with the county government, this sort of thing.

Teiser: If any wine in the state sells, Napa Valley wine sells, doesn't it?

Martini: I would think so. [laughing] I would think so. But they still feel that the other areas are increasing their activities and if they just sit still--I'm not in complete agreement with them. I think you can do too much promoting of something sometimes. But there's no point in fighting it, so, unless they get too expensive, why, we'll just let them go.

You know, some of these people that have come into the industry are pretty high-powered executives from other places, and are used to a different lifestyle and a different type of promotion than most of the old wine people are. And maybe we are falling behind the times as far as how you should promote wine, but my personal feeling is that you just can't promote wine like you do 7-Up or soap or something else; it's not the same type of product. You need a completely different approach.

In other words, I don't think that trying to push people to purchase wine is as cost-effective as, let's say, it is to try and push them to buy a brand of soap or to buy something else. I think it's more of an evolutionary process. And the people have got to at first get to know and like the wine, and then once they've done that, then you can sell them the wine, but until you've done that you might push a bottle or two on them, but you're not going to push very much.

Teiser: Has the association tackled the question of visitors to the wineries?

Martini: I don't think "tackle" is the word for it. [laughter] "Tackling" implies that they stop it. [more laughter] They've discussed it, and we have done some work on trying to see just what effect the winery visitors have on the valley. We have some statistics on the numbers of visitors, the numbers of places they visit, and so on, and it's very good material actually. They did this about five years ago, and then they did it again this last year to see where the change is.

Well, the last year's stuff hasn't been put through the computer yet, so we don't know the results of it. The one five years ago showed that the wineries did not have as great an effect as they thought; in other words, there aren't as many people that come into the valley to visit wineries only as they thought there were originally.

Teiser: But is there general feeling that the area is overcrowded in summer, on the weekends, and so forth?

Martini: Oh, a lot of people think that, sure.

Teiser: Do you think so?

Martini: Yes, for personal comfort, yes. For business, no. [laughing] You know, it depends upon what you want. No, I agree; I'd like to see it back to where it was in 1933 when we moved up here, but that's not feasible, so you put up with what you've got.

Teiser: Do you think that the tourists are having any effect upon shrinking the amount of land for vineyards?

Martini: No, not an awful lot. The tourists don't have an effect on that; that's from the people that want to move up here. But I don't think the tourists themselves have any effect as far as the vineyard land is concerned.

You know, the reason I'm not too excited about it is that I can't see how you could stop it without really getting involved in personal liberties of people.

Teiser: Well, you could stop giving them samples of wine.

Martini: Well, okay, but that's our best way of promoting. You know, that's the only way we ever did any promotion here at the start was letting people come in and taste wines and buy it. If you stop that, then you've got to go through other ways of promotion which are a lot more expensive and are not self-liquidating, which that activity is.

Teiser: The idea of a central tasting place has been discussed--

Martini: Oh, with 150 wineries in the valley? What good would it do? There's no point in even having your wines there, because nobody would want to taste the ones that they know or had heard about, they'd want to taste all the ones that they had never heard about. For one of us older, established wineries to present our wines at a tasting with a hundred wineries I think is absolutely worthless.

Teiser: I notice you don't often.

Martini: Well, we still do occasionally, but I don't think it's worth it. It's completely not cost-effective.

Teiser: When I go to large tastings I try to taste wines that I have never tasted before.

Martini: Sure, or wineries you'd never heard of before and so on. And that's what everybody does. They'll walk right by our table and say, "Oh yeah, we know those wines," and go on to somebody else's. And they do the same thing to Beaulieu and Krug and some of the others that have been around.

Teiser: I notice in all the published material on what consumers should like, recommended wines to buy, rarely are Martini wines mentioned.

Martini: I think it's primarily because we're old hat. You know, there's nothing exciting about mentioning Martini wines. Once in a while we get a mention on some, but most of the times we're pretty well overlooked.

Teiser: Do you not make an effort to have your wines tasted by publications?

Martini: We've made a little bit more of an effort recently than we have in the past. For a long time we really didn't make any effort at all.

Teiser: You have to get your wines to them.

Martini: Yes. It's difficult to get wines to people, to start with. And you can't depend on your distributors and so on to do it because they won't do it, when you have a new release. We've been trying to get a little bit more on the ball, and that's one reason we're looking for someone--in fact, we may have found her--someone that's going to handle just that department and make sure that we get out news releases. And just by sheer weight of volume you're going to get some of them listened to. [laughing]

Regional Water Quality Control Board

Teiser: Are there other organizations in which you've been active?

Martini: Well, I was on the school board up here for nine years, and then I was on the Regional Water Quality Control Board in Oakland for nine years, from 1972 to 1981.

Teiser: Ah, yes. That does have agricultural implications.

Martini: Yes. The Regional Water Quality Control Board actually controls the effluent that goes into San Francisco Bay, everything in the watershed of the San Francisco Bay. And it is made up of members within the region that represent different [groups]. There's somebody representing municipal government, somebody representing county government. I represented agricultural interests on it.

Teiser: Does it have anything to do with winery waste water?

Martini: Oh yes. We were involved in any kind of waste water, when it potentially contaminates streams or ground water. Any kind of waste water the board is involved in, and you have to get a permit from them to dispose of waste water.

Teiser: How about sprays and things in agriculture?

Martini: It was involved in it if they find their way into the water, yes. We were not involved in spraying programs or anything of that nature that did not potentially contaminate water.

Teiser: Were you able to do a good deal to keep things clean?

Martini: Well, the board's been in existence I think since about 1952, and San Francisco Bay is about fifteen times cleaner now than it was in 1952. In most areas--if it weren't for San Francisco, it would be swimmable in all areas.

Teiser: You could dig clams in the bay as your grandfather did?

Martini: Yes, well, there are clam beds and shrimp beds in the bay.

Teiser: Coming back now?

Martini: Oh yes. They're back. Once in a while they get clobbered, like the ones down near San Jose a couple of years ago where they had a big spill, but they're coming back again. And once the San Francisco situation is cleaned up, the bay will really show a marked improvement.

IV NAPA VINEYARD LAND AND CURRENT USE TRENDS

Teiser: What about the greenbelt? I know that this valley has legislation protecting agricultural lands. How does it work?

Martini: Well, we have what we call the Ag Preserve areas in the valley, in different parts of the valley. That was started back in '68 for the purpose of allowing people within the area to put their land under contract, what's called a Williamson Act contract, which is a contract with the county. It's a ten-year contract with the county, automatically renewable each year until either the county or the farmer cancels it, and then there's a ten-year phase-out period on it.

The purpose of it is that you are then taxed on the ability of the land to produce, and not what your neighbor paid for his property. Essentially the principle of taxation before was to take general land values, regardless of their use, and tax the land based on that. So a farmer with, say, 100 acres, and subdivisions all around him, would have his 100 acres taxed at subdivision prices. Under the Ag Preserve situation you continue to be taxed as agriculture as long as you stay in agriculture.

When we first put this in, our hope was that it would do two things. First of all, it would keep farmers from going out of business because of extremely high taxes. And secondly, it would maintain agricultural land prices at agricultural levels. Well, it's done the first, but it has not done the second. Land prices have still skyrocketed in spite of the fact that they're used for agriculture. And my feeling is that any land on the valley floor now is simply not worth farming if that's what you're depending upon for a living.

Teiser: If you have to buy it now--

Martini: If you have to buy it now, yes. It just can't be farmed, and get your money out of it, anyway.

Teiser: How much vineyard acreage do you guess is held by people who don't have to get their money out of it?

Martini: In this valley?

Teiser: Yes.

Martini: I really don't know, because most of them are not particularly large holdings. You know, I'm assuming that the larger wineries that have land in the valley all are doing it on a commercial basis, and they're not going around spending \$30,000 an acre for land. And that involves a lot of acreage. So most of the ones that are playthings are probably up to about forty acres, I would guess. I really don't know. I could make a guess and be 100 percent wrong. [laughing]

Teiser: In the aggregate they are not a significant part of the--

Martini: Well, they're significant enough to raise the price of all the land, however; they're not, you know, insignificant at all.

Teiser: Do many of the people who make wine for pleasure--I don't know what else you'd call it--buy, however, from the established vineyards?

Martini: To some extent, yes, they do. A lot of them do have their own small vineyard, and then may buy additional grapes so that they can try and get their winery built up. For instance, they may have twenty acres, but they want to sell 10,000 cases, and twenty acres is not enough to supply 10,000 cases, so they buy it from the outside to make up the difference. But most of them have vineyard land in connection with their winery some way.

Teiser: For the established winemakers and grape growers, have they helped them in any way? Have they hindered them in any way?

Martini: Well, they've made it impossible for the established ones to buy any more land, is one thing that they've done. As far as helping them, they might have helped in the sense that they made more good grapes available, because a lot of these landowners do not have wineries, but they do sell their grapes out, and if they've replanted their vineyards or just started planting their vineyards, they would have planted them to better grape varieties, and it has the effect of just making more good grapes available. And that's obviously helpful to the whole industry.

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June 27, 1981.

FIFTY YEARS IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

I WAS ALMOST BORN IN A WINERY - I MISSED IT BY ABOUT 100 FT. THAT WAS THE DISTANCE BETWEEN MY GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE AND HIS WINERY IN LIVERMORE. AT THAT TIME MY DAD WAS BETWEEN JOBS AND WE LIVED IN THE BAYVIEW DISTRICT OF SAN FRANCISCO. A COUPLE YEARS LATER WE MOVED TO KINGSBURG WHERE I GREW UP AND WAS FIRST EXPOSED TO WINERY ATMOSPHERE.

SOME OF THESE EARLY EXPERIENCES I STILL REMEMBER WELL. I RECALL THE FIRST TIME I EVER EXPERIENCED THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL. I WAS ABOUT 7 YEARS OLD AND A SCHOOL CHUM AND I WERE HANGING AROUND THE WINERY ONE SATURDAY MORNING WHEN WE DISCOVERED SEVERAL ROWS OF BRANDY BARRELS THAT HAD JUST BEEN EMPTIED. THE BUNGS WERE OFF AND I GUESS WE THOUGHT THEY SMELLED PRETTY GOOD. WE WENT RIGHT DOWN THE ROWS SMELLING THEM ALL AND MANAGED TO GET COMPLETELY PLASTERED. THAT WAS PROBABLY MY FIRST CONSCIENCE OLFACTORY EXPERIENCE.

OTHER FOND MEMORIES INCLUDE THE JUNK YARD - OR MUSEUM AS WE CALLED IT - A COLLECTION OF DISCARDED WINERY EQUIPMENT RUSTING AWAY BEHIND THE WINERY. TO A LITTLE BOY THIS EQUIPMENT BECAME MOTOR-CYCLES, POLICE CARS AND FIGHTER PLANE COCKPITS - WHAT A GREAT PLAY-GROUND.

ONE EVENT WHICH I DID NOT WITNESS BUT HEARD A LOT ABOUT LATER WAS THE BURNING DOWN OF OUR DISTILLERY. IT SEEMS THAT A GOVERNMENT GAUGER WANTED TO INSPECT THE INSIDE OF AN EMPTY BRANDY RECEIVING TANK. HIS FLASHLIGHT BATTERIES WERE DEAD SO HE CARRIED A CANDLE IN WITH HIM - HE CARRIED IT OUT TOO - RIGHT OUT THE TOP ALONG WITH THE

REST OF OUR DISTILLERY. THAT HAPPENED SOMETIME IN THE EARLY TWENTIES. ONE YEAR WHEN GRAPE PRICES WERE \$2.00/TON AND WE WERE OFFERING \$6.00/TON, OLD TRUCKS AND WAGONS LOADED WITH GRAPES FILLED THE YARD IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE AND STRETCHED FOR SEVERAL BLOCKS ALONG DINUBA AVENUE. SOME WERE THERE FOR THREE DAYS. TEAMS OF HORSES AND MULES WOULD BE UNHITCHED FROM THEIR WAGONS AND RIDDEN HOME AT NIGHT AND BACK IN THE MORNING. THERE WERE FIGHTS AMONG GROWERS WHO WERE TRYING TO CUT IN AHEAD OF EACH OTHER. THE GRAPES WERE MOSTLY THOMPSONS, SOME MUSCATS AND MALAGAS, MANY WERE CULLES.

I WELL RECALL THE DAY IN 1932 WHEN ROOSEVELT WAS ELECTED. HE HAD PROMISED TO REPEAL PROHIBITION AND OF COURSE MY DAD WAS ALL FOR HIM. WE KEPT THE STEAM UP IN THE BOILERS THAT NIGHT UNTIL ROOSEVELT WAS DECLARED A WINNER AT WHICH TIME MY DAD TIED DOWN THE CHAIN OF THE STEAM WHISTLE AND LET IT BLOW FOR ABOUT 15 MINUTES. THAT WAS SOMETIME AFTER MIDNIGHT. THERE WAS A BUMPER CROP OF BABIES IN KINGSBURG NINE MONTHS LATER.

AFTER PROHIBITION WAS REPEALED MY DAD WAS DETERMINED TO START A WINERY IN THE COASTAL COUNTIES. HE LOOKED AT SANTA CLARA, SONOMA AND NAPA COUNTIES. SANTA CLARA HE REJECTED AS HAVING THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR URBANIZATION. BETWEEN SONOMA AND NAPA HE CHOSE NAPA BECAUSE IT HAD MORE PREMIUM WINERIES THAN SONOMA. ORIGINALLY THE ST. HELENA WINERY WAS BUILT WITH THE IDEA OF PRODUCING THE DRY WINE THERE AND SHIPPING IT TO KINGSBURG FOR BOTTLING. WE DID THIS FOR A WHILE BUT IN A FEW YEARS DID BOTH PRODUCTION AND BOTTLING IN ST. HELENA.

DURING THE SEVEN YEARS THAT WE HAD BOTH PLANTS, I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE. I SPENT MOST OF MY VACATIONS DOING ALL SORTS OF THINGS IN THE WINERY. I THINK THAT AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER I UNDERTOOK ALMOST EVERY JOB EXCEPT RUNNING THE STILL. MY DAD NEVER LET ME DO THAT.

IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT I WAS IN THE FOOD TECH. (THEN CALLED FRUIT PRODUCTS) CLASS AT BERKELEY FROM WHICH IMMERGED 5 STUDENTS WHO SOMETIME LATER WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRODUCTION OF OVER 70% OF CALIFORNIA WINES. THE OTHERS IN THE SAME CLASS WERE CHARLIE CRAWFORD, ~~ZEN~~ HALPERIN, MYRON NIGHTINGALE, AND ARAM OHANASIAN. PROFESSORS CRUESS, ~~JOSALYN~~, MARSH, MRAK AND VAUGHN WORKED US HARD BUT WE HAD FUN TOO. I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER THE FIELD TRIPS TO VARIOUS FOOD PROCESSING PLANTS, INCLUDING WINERIES AND BREWERIES. LIKEWISE THE EVENING PICNICS AT THE CRUESS' HOSTED BY HIS CHARMING WIFE, MARIE, WERE ALWAYS A DELIGHT. I RECALL ONE OF THESE PICNICS WHEN I WAS GIVEN THE ASSIGNMENT OF MAKING THE PUNCH. THEY SHOWED ME A SHELF FULL OF DISCARDED EXPERIMENTAL FRUIT JUICES AND SAID THAT THESE AND A BAG OF CITRIC ACID WERE TO BE MY INGREDIENTS. LITTLE DID I SUSPECT THAT I HAD JUST STARTED A LIFETIME OF BLENDING. THAT WAS ALSO MY LAST YEAR AT BERKELEY -- THE NEXT YEAR I SPENT AT DAVIS.

IN 1940 WE SOLD THE KINGSBURG PLANT AND MOVED TO ST. HELENA. ONE YEAR LATER I FINISHED COLLEGE AND JOINED THE WINERY OPERATION WITH BOTH FEET. WE WERE DOING ABOUT 10,000 CASES A YEAR THEN, A BONAFIDE BOUTIQUE. IT HAD TAKEN US 8 YEARS TO GET TO THAT VOLUME.

OUR FACILITIES WERE PRETTY PRIMITIVE AND ANYTHING BUT SANITARY. WE FERMENTED OUR REDS IN TWO OPEN TOPPED 2,600 GALLON REDWOOD TANKS. COOLING WAS DONE BY PUMPING OVER THROUGH A HEAT EXCHANGER. IF WE DIDN'T NEED TO COOL, WE'D STAND ON A 2 X 12 AND PUNCH THE CAP DOWN WITH A 2 X 4. THERE WAS NO OSHA THEN. FOR A COOLING MEDIA WE USED TOWER WATER AND ON HOT OR HUMID DAYS WE'D HAVE TO BUY ICE BY THE TRUCK LOAD AND PASS THE WATER THROUGH IT. MANY EVENINGS WE'D WORK UNTIL THE WEE HOURS OF THE MORNING BREAKING UP ICE AND TOSSING IT INTO A SUMP.

A FEW YEARS AFTER BUILDING THE ST. HELENA WINERY WE PURCHASED A COUPLE HUNDRED ACRES OF VINEYARDS. IF WINERY OPERATIONS SOUNDED PRIMITIVE YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE VINEYARDS. THE ENTIRE 200 ACRES WAS PLOWED BY HORSES AND HAND HOED. OF COURSE WE WERE PICKING IN BOXES AND DUE TO THE MOUNTAIN TERRAIN AND DISTANCE FROM THE WINERY EACH BOX WAS HANDLED 9 TIMES IN THE COURSE OF A ROUND TRIP. HORSES WERE CONTINUED TO BE USED UNTIL THE LATE '40s. BULK HANDLING OF GRAPES STARTED IN THE LATE '50s.

MY TENURE IN THE WINERY IN 1941 WAS ONLY SIX MONTHS LONG AS I ENLISTED IN THE SERVICE AFTER PEARL HARBOR AND WAS AWAY FOR FOUR YEARS. WHEN I RETURNED THINGS HADN'T CHANGED MUCH.

EARLY IN 1942 I WAS DRIVING TO DENVER FOR A CHANGE IN ASSIGNMENT WHEN I STOPPED AT DAVIS TO SAY HELLO TO MY FORMER PROF, DR. AMERINE. IT WAS ABOUT 8:00 O'CLOCK AT NIGHT AND I FOUND DR. AMERINE AND FRANK SCHOONMAKER SEATED AT THE DINING ROOM TABLE WITH A DOZEN OPEN BOTTLES OF EXOTIC FOREIGN WINES. IT SEEMED THAT DR. AMERINE HAD JUST RECEIVED HIS ORDERS TO REPORT FOR MILITARY DUTY AND THEY WERE

ENJOYING THE WINES FROM MAYNARD'S CELLAR THAT PROBABLY WOULD NOT LAST UNTIL HIS RETURN. AFTER A COUPLE OF HOURS WITH THEM THE LONG DRIVE TO DENVER WAS A BREEZE.

MY FIRST VINTAGE AFTER THE WAR REALLY GOT ME OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT. DURING THE HARVEST SEASON WE HAD A VISIT BY A MEDICAL GROUP INTERESTED IN WINE. ONE OF THEM SLIPPED AND FELL INTO A SUMP OF FERMENTING RED JUICE. FORTUNATELY ONLY HIS DIGNITY WAS INJURED.

IN 1950 CHARLIE HOLDEN, THEN WITH PERALTA WINERY, DROPPED BY THE WINERY AND TOLD ME ABOUT A SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY FOR ENOLOGISTS THAT HE AND SEVERAL OTHERS WERE THINKING ABOUT STARTING. I RECALL HE SAID THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE SOCIETY WAS TO IMPROVE THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF THE ENOLOGIST, TAKE OVER THE SUMMER U.C.D. CONFERENCE ON ENOLOGY AND VITICULTURE, AND PUBLISH THE PROCEEDINGS OF *CONFERENCE*, THE ~~SOCIETY~~. I CANNOT RECALL IF THE EVENTUAL PUBLICATION OF A QUARTERLY JOURNAL WAS DISCUSSED. THAT MAY HAVE COME LATER. ENOLOGICAL AND VITICULTURAL LITERATURE WAS BEING PUBLISHED IN SUCH A WIDE VARIETY OF JOURNALS THAT IT SOON BECAME APPARENT A JOURNAL OF OUR OWN WAS NEEDED.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE SOCIETY WAS THE WOLFE HOTEL IN STOCKTON WHERE I CAN WELL REMEMBER MANY LONG AND ARGUMENTATIVE NIGHTS FOLLOWED BY A FOGGY DRIVE HOME ALONG THE RIVER ROAD.

IN 1955 I BECAME THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND IT WAS MY JOB TO PUT ON THE CONFERENCE. I THOUGHT IT TIME TO LEAVE THE SECURITY OF THE DAVIS CAMPUS AND FIND SOMEPLACE WHERE WE COULD BRING OUR WIVES AND FAMILIES. THE BOARD AGREED AND INSTRUCTED ME TO FIND A SITE, A FRIEND TOLD ME ASILOMAR WAS SUCH A SITE SO I INVESTIGATED IT. IT WAS IDEAL

FOR OUR FLEDGING SOCIETY. IT HAD GOOD CONFERENCE FACILITIES, NICE ROOMS, A NEARBY BEACH AND IT WAS RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVE. HOWEVER, NO ONE TOLD ME THAT ASILOMAR WAS IN PACIFIC GROVE AND PACIFIC GROVE WAS DRY. NOR DID THEY TELL ME THAT ALONG WITH US WOULD BE A TEMPERENCE GROUP HAVING A CONFERENCE. I DISCOVERD ALL THIS WHEN I TRIED TO ARRANGE THE BANQUET AND WINES FOR THE LUNCHES. IMAGINE MY EMBARRASSMENT, IT WAS TO LATE TO PULL OUT. SO WE HELD THE BANQUET AT THE SPINDRIFT AND ATE OUR LUNCHES WITHOUT WINE. THE SOCIETY MUST NOT HAVE CONSIDERED THE SITUATION INTOLERABLE AS THEY RETURNED TWO YEARS LATER.

AFTER THAT THE CONFERENCE STARTED JUMPING AROUND THE STATE QUITE A BIT. FROM SAN DIEGO TO TAHOE AND MORE RECENTLY EVEN LAS VEGAS. IN THOSE EARLY DAYS WE ALWAYS HAD A BANQUET SPEAKER. SOME WERE GOOD BUT AFTER THE DINNER AND WINES IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO RETAIN AN AUDIENCE'S ATTENTION.

ONE OF THE BETTER ONES I THOUGHT WAS BERN RAMEY'S "THE WINESAP IS NOT NECESSARILY AN APPLE" DELIVERED WITH HIS USUAL GOOD HUMOR. I ALSO RECALL MY DAD'S SPEECH RELATING SOME OF HIS EXPERIENCES DURING PROHIBITION. IN ONE PASSAGE HE DESCRIBED 1918 AS A PARTICULARLY DISASTROUS YEAR FOR HIM, HE SAID "I LOST MY JOB, CONTRACTED DOUBLE PNEUMONIA, AND LOUIS WAS BORN."

ONE INDIVIDUAL THAT I THINK DESERVES A LOT OF CREDIT FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE SOCIETY IN ITS EARLY YEARS IS ^{ZEV} ~~ZIA~~ HALPERIN. WHEN HE WAS APPOINTED BUSINESS MANAGER HE TOOK A SOCIETY THAT WAS FINANCIALLY STRUGGLING AND MADE IT SOLVENT. HE DID IT BY A LOT OF HARD WORK IN GETTING ADS AND INDUSTRIAL AFFILIATES. THESE ORIGINAL EIGHT I.A.'s IN 1956 REALLY HELPED. NOW THERE ARE 99.

IN WINE PRODUCTION ONE COULD SEE SOME DEFINITE SIGNS OF THE FUTURE. STAINLESS STARTED BEING MORE WIDELY USED BOTH FOR TANKS AND EQUIPMENT. JACKETED FERMENTERS WERE BEGINNING TO SHOW UP. I HAVE SEEN IT WRITTEN THAT THIS WAS THE START OF TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED FERMENTATIONS. THIS IS NOT TRUE. MOST WINERIES WERE CONTROLLING FERMENTATION TEMPERATURES SINCE THE '30s. THE NEW TANKS JUST MADE IT EASIER.

IN THE '50s SALES WERE NOT TOO BRISK SO THE PLANTING OF PREMIUM WINE GRAPES SLOWED DOWN. GROWERS WERE BECOMING AWARE OF CLIMATIC REGIONS AND SOIL TYPES. IT HAD BEEN 10 YEARS SINCE AMERINE AND WINKLER PUBLISHED ON THIS AND SOME OF THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS WERE STARTING TO BEAR FRUIT. THIS CONTINUED ON A FAIRLY EVEN KEEL INTO THE '60s. HOWEVER, IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1960 DECADE THE DAM BURST. THE DEMAND FOR FINE WINES WAS EXPANDING SO RAPIDLY THAT A GRAPE PLANTING BOOM STARTED. LOTS OF NEW MONEY STARTED COMING INTO THE INDUSTRY AND ^{MANY} ~~EVERYONE~~ FORGOT ABOUT AMERINE AND WINKLER. CABERNET SAUVIGNON AND PINOT NOIR WERE BEING PLANTED SIDE BY SIDE ON MOUNTAIN TOPS AND RIVER BOTTOMS, IN REGIONS I, II, III, IV AND PROBABLY EVEN V. HOW MUCH BETTER OFF WE WOULD NOW BE IF A LITTLE MORE THOUGHT HAD GONE INTO SOME OF THESE PLANTINGS. THE REST IS HISTORY YOU ALL KNOW.

WAS THIS SUDDEN ACTIVITY IN GRAPE GROWING GOOD OR BAD FOR THE INDUSTRY? IN THE SHORT TERM I THINK IT WAS PROBABLY BAD. IT CREATED A HARDSHIP ON THE BONAFIDE FARMER EARNING HIS LIVELIHOOD GROWING GRAPES AND DEPRESSED PRICES DUE TO OVERPRODUCTION. IN THE LONG RUN IT IS PROBABLY GOOD. IT HAS OPENED UP NEW GROWING AREAS,

CONVERTED FARM LAND FROM OTHER CROPS TO GRAPES, GAVE THE WINE-MAKER A LARGER SELECTION OF EACH VARIETY AND HAS GENERALLY UPGRADED THE QUALITY OF STANDARD WINES AND GAVE US A LARGER QUANTITY OF QUALITY PREMIUM WINES. THE VITICULTURAL ERRORS WILL EVENTUALLY IRON THEMSELVES OUT.

I'M OFTEN ASKED WHAT I THINK ABOUT BOUTIQUE WINERIES AND WHAT IS THEIR EFFECT ON THE ESTABLISHED WINERIES? MY THOUGHT ON BOUTIQUE WINERIES IS THAT THEY ARE PRETTY MUCH LIKE OTHER WINERIES. SOME ARE TURNING OUT SOME GOOD WINES; SOME ARE TURNING OUT SOME GOOD PRESS; SOME ARE DOING BOTH; AND SOME ARE DOING NEITHER. THEIR EFFECT ON THE ESTABLISHED WINERIES HAS BEEN PRIMARILY ONE OF DILUTION. THEY TAKE UP SHELF SPACE, THEY TAKE UP SPACE ON WINE LISTS, AND THEY TAKE UP COLUMN INCHES. THEY HAVE CREATED MORE INTEREST IN GOOD WINES AND HAVE RAISED THE CONSUMER CEILING ON WINE PRICES. THEIR PRICING POLICIES AND GROWTH WILL BE INTERESTING TO MONITOR. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHERE THE POINT OF SATURATION IS.

OF MORE CONCERN TO ME ARE THE MADISON AVENUE TACTICS USED IN OTHER BUSINESSES THAT HAVE BECOME A PART OF THE WINE BUSINESS. IT MAY CREATE QUICK GAINS FOR THE GREEDY BUT CERTAINLY MAKES THE ENTIRE INDUSTRY A MUCH LESS PLEASANT ATMOSPHERE TO LIVE UNDER. PERHAPS IN THE LONG RUN THERE IS NO NEED TO WORRY BECAUSE THESE ARE THE SAME PEOPLE THAT WILL DESERT THE INDUSTRY FOR MORE LUCRATIVE FIELDS.

WHAT DO I THINK OF THE FUTURE? LIKE EVERYONE ELSE I THINK IT IS PRACTICALLY UNLIMITED. DEMAND IS BOUND TO INCREASE. WE NEED TO

TURN OUT A GOOD SOUND PRODUCT AT A FAIR PRICE AND THE COUNTRY IS READY TO ACCEPT IT. NEW WINE DRINKERS WILL BE CREATED AND CURRENT WINE DRINKERS WILL UPGRADE. I LOOK FOR THE PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION TO DOUBLE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS. TO KEEP OUR SHARE OF THIS MARKET WE MUST PRODUCE MORE SOUND PALATABLE RED WINES AT LOWER PRICES AND LESS MEDIOCRE WINES AT VERY HIGH PRICES. IF THERE IS A FIVE DOLLAR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO BOTTLES OF WINE THERE SHOULD BE PROPORTIONATE DIFFERENCE IN QUALITY. IF THERE ISN'T WE WILL EVENTUALLY LOSE CONSUMER CREDITABILITY.

I BELIEVE THE FOREIGN MARKET WILL SLOWLY DEVELOP INTO A SIGNIFICANT VOLUME IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS. WITH THE INTEREST AND HELP OF OUR GOVERNMENT, FOREIGN COUNTRIES MAY WELL REALIZE THAT EXCESSIVELY RESTRICTIVE TRADE BARRIERS MAY BE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE. I AM CONFIDENT WE COULD CAPTURE A RESPECTABLE VOLUME OF THAT MARKET IF GIVEN THE TIME AND OPPORTUNITY.

~~The U.S. CALIFORNIA~~ HAS BEEN PRODUCING MANY VERY GOOD WINES, MANY AT REASONABLE PRICES. SHE WILL PRODUCE MORE. WHEN THE CONSUMER, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD, REALLY DISCOVERS THEM WITH HIS OWN PALATE INSTEAD OF DEPENDING UPON THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS - LOOK OUT! THERE WON'T BE ENOUGH GRAPE LAND AVAILABLE TO SUPPLY THE DEMAND.

IN CLOSING I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THAT THIS IS A GREAT INDUSTRY WITH GREAT PEOPLE IN IT. I AM HAPPY I CHOSE IT AS A CAREER. IT HAS TREATED ME WELL, I AM ALSO HAPPY SOME OF OUR CHILDREN HAVE CHOSEN IT AS A CAREER AND I'M CONFIDENT IT WILL TREAT THEM WELL TOO. ~~REMEMBER OLD~~
~~wise good winemakers -~~
~~WINEMAKERS NEVER DIE -- THEY JUST DROP THEIR COLOR.~~ If the interest
as expressed in dollars, at the Napa Valley wine auction
last weekend is any indication of the ~~the~~ ^{international} friends a
future is indeed ~~bright~~ ^{THANK YOU}.

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